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Lady Good-for-Nothing

A. T. Quiller-Couch

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LADY GOOD-FOR-NOTHING

LADY GOOD-FOR-NOTHING

A MAN'S PORTRAIT OF A WOMAN

BY

A. T. QUILLER-COUCH

("Q")

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
NEW YORK : : : : : : : : : 1910

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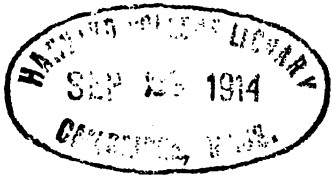

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CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

Published September, 1910

"An innocent life, yet far astray."

—WORDSWORTH'S "RUTH."

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BOOK I

PORT NASSAU

LADY GOOD-FOR-NOTHING

CHAPTER I

THE BEACH

A COACH-AND-SIX, as a rule, may be called an impressive Object. But something depends on where you see it.

Viewed from the tall cliffs—along the base of which, on a strip of beach two hundred feet below, it crawled between the American continent and the Atlantic Ocean—Captain Oliver Vyell's coach-and-six resembled nothing so nearly as a black beetle.

For that matter the cliffs themselves, swept by the spray and humming with the roar of the beach—even the bald headland towards which they curved as to the visible bourne of all things terrestrial—shrank in comparison with the waste void beyond, where sky and ocean weltered together after the wrestle of a two days' storm; and in comparison with the thought that this rolling sky and heaving water stretched all the way to Europe. Not a sail showed, not a wing anywhere under the leaden clouds that still dropped their rain in patches, smurring out the horizon. The wind had died down, but the ships kept their harbours and the sea-birds

their inland shelters. Alone of animate things, Captain Vyell's coach-and-six crept forth and along the beach, as though tempted by the promise of a wintry gleam to landward.

A god—if we may suppose one of the old careless Olympians seated there on the cliff-top, nursing his knees—must have enjoyed the comedy of it, and laughed to think that this pert beetle, edging its way along the sand amid the eternal forces of nature, was here to take seizin of them—yes, actually to take seizin and exact tribute. So indomitable a fellow is Man, *improbus Homo;* and among men in his generation Captain Oliver Vyell was Collector of Customs for the Port of Boston, Massachusetts.

In fairness to Captain Vyell be it added that he—a young English blood, bearing kinship with two or three of the great Whig families at home, and sceptical as became a person of quality—was capable as anyone of relishing the comedy, had it been pointed out to him. With equal readiness he would have scoffed at man's pretensions in this world and denied him any place at all in the next. Nevertheless on a planet, the folly of which might be taken for granted, he claimed at least his share of the reverence paid by fools to rank and wealth. He was travelling this lonely coast on a tour of inspection, to visit and report upon a site where His Majesty's advisers had some design to plant a fort;

and a fine ostentation coloured his progress here as through life. He had brought his coach because it conveyed his claret and his *batterie de cuisine* (the seaside inns were detestable); but being young and extravagantly healthy, and, with all his faults, very much of a man, he preferred to ride ahead on his saddle-horse and let his pomp follow him.

Six horses drew the coach, and to each pair of leaders rode a postilion, while a black coachman guided the wheelers from the box-seat—all three men in the Collector's livery of white and scarlet. On a perch behind the vehicle—which, for all its weight, left but the shallowest of wheel-ruts on the hard sand—sat Manasseh, the Collector's cook and body-servant; a huge negro, in livery of the same white and scarlet but with heavy adornments of bullion, a cockade in his hat, and a loaded blunderbuss laid across his thighs. Last and alone within the coach, with a wine-case for footstool, sat a five-year-old boy.

Master Dicky Vyell—the Collector's only child, and motherless—sat and gazed out of the windows in a delicious terror. For hours that morning the travellers had ploughed their way over a plain of blown sand, dotted with scrub-oaks, bay-berries, and clumps of Indian grass; then, at a point where the tall cliffs began, had wound down to the sea between low foothills and a sedge-covered marsh criss-crossed by watercourses that spread out here and there into lagoons. At the

head of this descent the Atlantic had come into sight, and all the way down its echoes had grown in the boy's ears, confusing themselves with a delicious odour which came in fact from the fields of sedge though he attributed it to the ocean.

But the sound had amounted to a low humming at most; and it was with a leap and a roar, as they rounded the last foothill and saw the vast empty beach running northward before them, league upon league, that the thunder of the surf broke on them. For a while the boom and crash of it fairly stunned the child. He caught at an arm-strap hanging by the window and held on with all his small might, while the world he knew with its familiar protective boundaries fell away, melted, left him—a speck of life ringed about with intolerable roaring emptiness. To a companion, had there been one in the coach, he must have clung in sheer terror; yes, even to his father, to whom he had never clung and could scarcely imagine himself clinging. But his father rode ahead, carelessly erect on his blood-horse—horse and rider seen in a blur through the salt-encrusted glass. Therefore Master Dicky held on as best he might to the arm-strap.

By degrees his terror drained away, though its ebb left him shivering. Child though he was, he could not remember when he had not been curious about the sea. In a dazed fashion he stared out upon the breakers. The wind had died down after the tempest but

the sea kept its agitation. Meeting the shore (which hereabouts ran shallow for five or six hundred yards) it reared itself in ten-foot combers, rank stampeding on rank, until the sixth or seventh hurled itself far up the beach, spent itself in a long receding curve, and drained back to the foaming forces behind. Their untiring onset fascinated Dicky; and now and again he tasted renewal of his terror, as a wave, taller than the rest or better timed, would come sweeping up to the coach itself, spreading and rippling about the wheels and the horses' fetlocks. "Surely this one would engulf them," thought the child, recalling Pharaoh and his chariots; but always the furious charge spent itself in an edge of white froth that faded to delicate salt filagree and so vanished. When this had happened a dozen times or more, and still without disaster, he took heart and began to turn it all into a game, choosing this or that breaker and making imaginary wagers upon it; but yet the spectacle fascinated him, and still at the back of his small brain lay wonder that all this terrifying fury and uproar should always be coming to nothing. God must be out yonder (he thought) and engaged in some mysterious form of play. He had heard a good deal about God from Miss Quiney, his governess; but this playfulness, as an attribute of the Almighty, was new to him and hitherto unsuspected.

The beach, with here and there a break, extended for close upon twenty miles, still curving towards the head-

land; and the travellers covered more than two-thirds of the distance without meeting or espying a living creature. As the afternoon wore on the weather improved. The sun, soon to drop behind the cliff-summits on the left, asserted itself with a last effort and shot a red gleam through a chink low in the cloud-wrack. The shaft widened. The breakers—indigo-backed till now and turbid with sand in solution—began to arch themselves in grass-green hollows, with rainbows playing on the spray of their crests. And then—as though the savage coast had become, at a touch of sunshine, habitable—our travellers spied a man.

He came forth from a break in the cliffs half a mile ahead and slowly crossed the sands to the edge of the surf, the line of which, he began, after a pause, to follow as slowly northwards. His back was turned thus upon the Collector's *caravan*, to which in crossing the beach he had given no attention, being old and purblind.

The coach rolled so smoothly, and the jingle of harness was so entirely swallowed in the roar of the sea, that Captain Vyell, pushing ahead and overtaking the old fellow, had to ride up to his shoulder and shout. It appeared then, for further explanation, that his hearing as well as his eyesight was none of the best. He faced about in a puzzled fashion, stared, and touched his hat—or rather lifted his hand a little way and dropped it again.

"Your Honour will be the Collector," he said, and nodded many times, at first as if proud of his sagacity, but afterwards dully—as though his interest had died out and he would have ceased nodding but had forgotten the way. "Yes; my gran'-darter told me. She's in service at the Bowling Green, Port Nassau; but walks over on Lord's Days to cheer up her mother and tell the news. They've been expectin' you at Port Nassau any time this week."

The Collector asked where he lived, and the old man pointed to a gully in the cliff and to something which, wedged in the gully, might at a first glance be taken for a large and loosely-constructed bird's nest. The Collector's keen eyes made it out to be a shanty of timber roofed with shingles and barely overtopping a wood pile.

"Wreckwood, eh?"

"A good amount of it ought to be comin' in, after the gale."

"Then where's your hook?"—for the wreck-wood gatherers along this part of the coast carry long gaffs to hook the flotsam and drag it above reach of the waves.

"Lift it up the bank," said the old man shortly. After a moment he pulled himself together for an explanation, hollowed his palms around his mouth, and bawled above the boom of the surf. "I'm old. I don't carry weight more'n I need to. When a log

comes in, my darter spies it an' tells me. She's mons'rous quick-sighted for wood an' such like—though good for nothin' else." (A pause.) "No, I'm hard on her; she can cook clams."

"You were looking for clams?" Captain Vyell scrutinized the man's face. It was a patriarchal face, strikingly handsome and not much wrinkled; the skin delicately tanned and extraordinarily transparent. Somehow this transparency puzzled him. "Hungry?" he asked quickly; and as quickly added, "starving for food, that's what you are."

"It's the Lord's will," answered the old man.

The coach had come to a halt a dozen paces away. The child within it could hear nothing of this conversation; but to the end of his life his memory kept vivid the scene and the two figures in it—his father, in close-fitting riding-coat of blue, with body braced, leaning sideways a little against the wind, and a characteristic hint of the cavalryman about the slope of the thigh; the old wreck-picker standing just forward of the bay's shoulder and looking up, with blown hair and patient eyes. Memory recalled even the long slant of the bay's shoulder—a perfectly true detail, for the horse was of pure English race and bred by the Collector himself.

After this, as he remembered, some command must have been given, for Manasseh climbed down, opened

the coach door and drew from under the seat a box, of which he raised the lid, disclosing things good to eat—among them a pasty with a crisp brown crust.

The wreck-picker broke off a piece of the pasty and wrapped it in a handkerchief—and memory recalled, as with a small shock of surprise, that the handkerchief was clean. The old man, though ragged enough to scare the crows, was clean from his bare head to his bare sea-bleached feet. He munched the rest of the pasty, talking between mouthfuls. To his discourse Dicky paid no heed, but slipped away for a scamper on the sands.

As he came running back he saw the old man, in the act of wiping his mouth with the back of his hand, suddenly shoot out an arm and point. Just beyond the breakers a solitary bird—an osprey—rose with a fish shining in the grip of its claws. It flew northward, away for the headland, for a hundred yards or so; and then by some mischance let slip his prey, which fell back into the sea. The boy saw the splash. To his surprise the bird made no effort to recover the fish—neither stooped nor paused—but went winging sullenly on its way.

"That's the way o' them," commented the old wreck-picker. "Good food, an' to let it go. I could teach him better."

But the boy, years after, read it as another and different parable.

CHAPTER II

PORT NASSAU

THEY left the beach, climbed a road across the neck of the promontory, and rattled downhill into Port Nassau. Dusk had fallen before they reached the head of its cobbled street; and here one of the postilions drew out a horn from his holster and began to blow loud blasts on it. This at once drew the townsfolk into the road and warned them to get out of the way.

To the child, drowsed by the strong salt air and the rocking of the coach, the glimmering whitewashed houses on either hand went by like a procession in a dream. The figures and groups of men and women on the sidewalks, too, had a ghostly, furtive air. They seemed to the boy to be whispering together and muttering. Now this was absurd; for what with the blare of the postilion's horn, the clatter of hoofs, the jolting and rumbling of wheels, the rattle of glass, our travellers had all the noise to themselves—or all but the voice of the gale now rising again for an afterclap and snoring at the street corners. Yet his instinct

was right. Many of the crowd *were* muttering. These New Englanders had no love to spare for a Collector of Customs, a fine gentleman from Old England and (rumour said) an atheist to boot. They resented this ostent of entry; the men more sullenly than the women, some of whom in their hearts could not help admiring its high-and-mighty insolence.

The Collector, at any rate, had a crowd to receive him, for it was Saturday evening. On Saturdays by custom the fishing-fleet of Port Nassau made harbour before night fall and the crews kept a sort of decorous carnival before the Sabbath, of which they were strict observers. In the lower part of the town, by the quays, much buying and selling went on, in booths of sail-cloth lit as a rule by oil-flares. For close upon a week no boat had been able to put to sea, but the Saturday market and the Saturday gossip and to-and-fro strolling were in full swing none the less; though the salesmen had to substitute hurricane-lamps for their ordinary flares, and the boy—now wide awake again—had a passing glimpse of a couple of booths that had been wrecked by the rising wind and were being rebuilt. He craned out, staring at the helpers, while they, pausing in their work and dragged to and fro by the flapping canvas, stared back as the coach went by.

It came to a halt on a level roadway some few rods beyond this bright traffic in an open space which, he

knew, must be near the waterside, for beyond the lights of the booths he had spied a cluster of masts quite close at hand. Or perhaps he had fallen asleep and in his sleep had been transported far inland. For the wind had suddenly died down, the coach appeared to be standing in a forest glade—at any rate, among trees—and through the trees fell a soft radiance that might well be the moon's were it only a tinge less yellow. In the shine of it stood Manasseh, holding open the coach door; and, as the child stepped out, these queer impressions were succeeded by one still more curious and startling. For a hand, as it seemed, reached out of the darkness, brushed him smartly across the face, and was gone. He gave a little cry and stood staring aloft at a lantern that hung some feet above him from an arched bracket. Across its glass face ran the legend BOWLING GREEN INN, in orange-coloured lettering, and the rays of its oil-lamp wavered on the boughs of two tall maples set like sentinels by the Inn gateway and reddening now to the fall of the leaf. Yes, the ground about his feet was strewn with leaves: it must be one of these that had brushed by his face.

If the folk in the streets had been sullen, those of the Inn were eager enough, even obsequious. A trio of grooms fell to unharnessing the horses; a couple of porters ran to and fro, unloading the baggage and cooking-pots; while the landlady shouted orders right and left in the porchway. She deemed, honest soul,

that she was mistress of the establishment, until Manasseh undeceived her.

Manasseh's huge stature and gold-encrusted livery commanded respect in spite of his colour. He addressed her as "woman." "Woman, if you will stop yo' cacklin' and yo' crowin'? Go in now and fetch me fish, fetch me chickens, fetch me plenty eggs. Fetch me a dam scullion. Heh? Stir yo' legs and fetch me a dam scullion, and the chickens tender. His Exc'llence mos' partic'ler the chickens tender."

Still adjuring her he shouldered his way through the house to the kitchen, whence presently his voice sounded loud, authoritative, above the clatter of cooking-pots. From time to time he broke away from the business of unpacking to reiterate his demands for fish, eggs, chicken—the last to be tender at all costs and at pain of his tremendous displeasure.

"And I assure you, ma'am," said Captain Vyell, standing in the passage at the door of his private room, "his standard is a high one. I believe the blackguard never stole a tough fowl in his life. . . . Show me to my bedroom, please, if the trunks are unstrapped; and the child, here, to his. . . . Eh? What's this?—a rush-light? I don't use rush-lights. Go to Manasseh and ask him to unpack you a pair of candles."

The landlady returned with a silver candlestick in either hand, and candles of real wax. She had never seen the like, and led the way upstairs speculating on

their cost. The bedrooms proved to be clean, though bare and more than a little stuffy—their windows having been kept shut for some days against the gale. The Collector commanded them to be opened. The landlady faintly protested. "The wind will gutter the candles—and such wax too!" She was told to obey, and she obeyed.

In the boy's room knelt a girl—a chambermaid—unstrapping his small valise. She had a rush-light on the floor beside her, and did not look up as the landlady thrust open the lattice and left the room with the Collector, the boy remaining behind. His candle stood upon a chest of drawers by the window and, as the others went out, a draught of wind caught the dimity curtain, blew it against the flame, and in an instant ignited it.

The girl looked up swiftly at the sudden light above her, and as swiftly—before the child could cry out—was on her feet. She caught the fire between her two hands and beat it out, making no noise and scarcely flinching, though her flesh was certainly being scorched.

"That was lucky," she said, looking across at him with a smile.

"Ruth!—Ruth!" called the landlady's voice, up the corridor. "Here, a moment!"

She dropped the charred curtain and hurried to answer the call.

"Ruth! Where's the bootjack? His Honour will take off his riding-boots."

"Bootjack, ma'am?" interrupted the Collector, leaning back in a chair and extending a shapely leg with instep and ankle whereon the riding-boot fitted like a glove. "I don't maul my leather with bootjacks. Send Manasseh upstairs to me; ask him with my compliments what the devil he means by clattering saucepans when he should be attending to his master. . . . Eh, what's this?"

"She can do it, your Honour," said the landlady, catching her by the shoulder and motioning her to kneel and draw off the boot. (It is likely she shirked carrying the message.)

"Oh, very well, if only she won't twist my foot. . . . Take care of the spur, child."

The girl knelt, and with her blistered hand took hold of the boot-heel below the spur. It cost her exquisite pain, but she did not wince; and her head being bent, no one perceived the tears in her eyes.

She had scarcely drawn off the second boot, when Manasseh appeared in the doorway carrying a silver tray with glasses and biscuits; a glass of red wine for his master, a more innocent cordial for the young gentleman, and both glasses filmed over with the chill of crushed ice.

The girl was withdrawing when the Collector, carelessly feeling in his pocket, drew out a coin and put

it into her hand. Her fingers closed on it sharply, almost with a snatch. In truth, the touch of metal was so intolerable to the burnt flesh that, but for clutching it so, she must have dropped the coin. Still, with bowed head she passed quietly from the room.

Master Dicky munched his macaroon, and sipped his cordial. He had a whole guinea in his breeches pocket, and was thinking it would be great fun to step out and explore the town, if only for a little way. To-morrow was Sunday, and all the stores would be closed. But Manasseh was too busy to come with him for body-guard—and his father's boots were off; and besides, he stood in great awe and shyness of his admired parent. Had the boots been on, it would have cost him a bold effort to make the request. On the whole, the cordial warming him, Master Dicky had a mind to take French leave.

CHAPTER III

TWO GUINEAS

THOUGH the wind hummed among the chimneys and on the back of the roof, on either side of the lamp over the gateway the maples stood in the lee and waved their boughs gently, shedding a leaf now and then in some deflected gust. Beyond, to the left, stretched a dim avenue, also of maples; and at the end of this, as he reached the gate, the boy could spy the lights of the fair.

There was no risk at all of losing his way.

He stepped briskly forth and down the avenue. Where the trees ended, and with them the high wall enclosing the inn's stable-yard, the wind rushed upon him with a whoop, and swept him off the sidewalk almost to the middle of the roadway. But by this time the lights were close at hand. He pressed his little hat down on his head and battled his way towards them.

The first booth displayed sweetmeats; the next hung out lines of sailors' smocks, petticoats, sea-boots, oil-skin coats and caps, that swayed according to their weight; the third was no booth but a wooden store, wherein a druggist dispensed his wares; the fourth, also

of wood, belonged to a barber, and was capable of seating one customer at a time while the others waited their turn on the sidewalk. Here—his shanty having no front—the barber kept them in good humour by chatting to all and sundry while he shaved; but a part of the crowd had good-naturedly drifted on to help his neighbour, a tobacco-seller, whose stall had suffered disaster. A painted wooden statue of a Cherokee Indian lay face downward across the walk, as the wind had blown it: bellying folds of canvas and tarpaulin hid the wreck of the poor man's stock-in-trade. Beyond this wreckage stood, in order, a vegetable stall, another sweetmeat stall, and a booth in which the boy (who cared little for sweetmeats, and, moreover, had just eaten his macaroon), took much more interest. For it was hung about with cages; and in the cages were birds of all kinds (but the most of them canaries), perched in the dull light of two horn lanterns, and asleep with open, shining eyes; and in the midst stood the proprietor, blowing delightful liquid notes upon a bird-call.

It fascinated Dicky; and he no sooner assured himself that the birds were really for sale—although no purchaser came forward—than there came upon him an overmastering desire to own a live canary in a cage and teach it with just such a whistle. (He had often wondered at the things upon which grown-up folk spent their money to the neglect of this world's true

delights.) Edging his way to the stall, he was summoning up courage to ask the price of a bird, when the salesman caught sight of him and affably spared him the trouble.

"Eh! here's my young lord wants a bird. . . . You may say what you like," said he, addressing the bystanders, "but there's none like the gentry for encouragin' trade. . . . And which shall it be, sir? Here's a green parrot, now, I can recommend; or if your Honour prefers a bird that'll talk, this gray one. A beauty, see! And not a bad word in his repertory. Your honoured father shall not blame me for sellin' you a swearer."

The boy pointed to a cage on the man's right.

"A canary? Well, and you're right. What is talk, after all, to compare with music? And chosen the best bird of my stock, you have: the pick of the whole crop. That's quality, my friends; nothing but the best'll do for quality, an' the instinct of it comes out young." The man, who was evidently an eccentric, ran his eye roguishly over the faces behind the boy and named his price; a high one—a very high one—but one nicely calculated to lie on the right side of public reprobation.

Dicky laid his guinea on the sill. "I want a whistle, too," he said, "and my change, please."

The bird-fancier slapped his breeches' pockets.

"A guinea? Bless me, but I must run around and

ask one of my neighbours to oblige. Any of you got the change for a golden guinea about you?" he asked of the crowd.

"We ain't so lucky," said a voice somewhere at the back. "We don't carry guineas about, nor give 'em to our bastards."

A voice or two—a woman's among them—called "Shame!" "Hold your tongue, there!"

Dicky had his back to the speaker. He heard the word for the first time in his life, and had no notion of its meaning; but in a dim way he felt it to be an evil word, and also that the people were protesting out of pity. A rush of blood came to his face. He gulped, lifted his chin, and said with his eyes steady on the face of the blinking fancier,

"Give it to me, please, and I will get it changed."

He took the coin, and walked away resolutely with a set white face. He saw none of the people who made way for him.

The bird-fancier stared after the small figure as it walked away into darkness. "Bastard?" he said; "there's blood in that youngster, though he don't face ye again an' I lose my deal. Blood's blood, however ye come by it; you may take that on the word of a breeder. An' you ought to be ashamed, Sam Wilson, slingin' yer mud at a child!"

The word drummed in the boy's ears. What did

it mean? What was the sneer in it? "Brat!" "cry-baby," "tell-tale," "story-teller," these were opprobrious words, to be resented in their degree; and all but the first covered accusations which not only must never be deserved, but obliged a gentleman, however young, to show fight. But "bastard"?

He felt that, whatever it meant, somehow it was worse than any; that honour called for the annihilation of the man that dared speak it; that there was weakness, perhaps even poltroonery, in merely walking away. If only he knew what the word meant!

He came to a halt opposite the drug store. He had once heard Dr. Lamerton, the apothecary at home, described as a "well-to-do" man. The phrase stuck in his small brain, and he connected the sale of drugs with wealth. (How, he reasoned, could any one be tempted to sell wares so nasty unless by prodigious profit?) He felt sure the drug-seller would be able to change the guinea for him, and walked in boldly. His ears were tingling, and he felt a call to assert himself.

There was a single customer in the store—a girl. With some surprise he recognized her for the girl who had beaten the flame out of the curtain.

She stood with her back to the doorway and a little sideways by the counter, from behind which the drug-seller—a burly fellow in a suit of black—looked down on her doubtfully, rubbing his shaven trick while he

glanced from her to something he held in his open palm.

"I'm askin' you," he said, "how you came by it?"

"It was given to me," the girl answered.

"That's a likely tale! Folks don't give money like this to a girl in your position; unless—"

Here the man paused.

"Is it a great deal of money?" she asked. There was astonishment in her voice, and a kind of suppressed eagerness.

"Oh, come now, that's too innocent by half! A guinea-piece is a guinea-piece, and a guinea is twenty-one shillings; and twenty-one shillings, likely enough, is more'n you'll earn in a year outside o' your keep. Who gave it ye?"

"A gentleman—the Collector—at the inn just now."

"Ho!" said the drug-seller, with a world of meaning.

"But if," she went on, "it is worth so much as you say, there must be some mistake. Give it back to me, please. I am sorry for troubling you." She took a small, round parcel from her pocket, laid it on the counter, and held out her hand for the coin.

The drug-seller eyed her. "There must be some mistake, I guess," said he, as he gave back the gold piece. "No, and you can take up your packet too; I don't grudge two-pennyworth of salve. But wait a moment while I serve this small customer, for I want a

word with you later. . . . Well, and what can I do for you, young gentleman?" he asked, turning to Dicky.

Dicky advanced to the shop-board, and as he did so the girl turned and recognized him with a faint, very shy smile.

"If you please," he said politely, "I want change for this—if you can spare it."

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed the man, staring. "What, *another?*"

"The bird-seller up the road had no money in his pockets. And, if you please," went on Dick hardily, with a glance at the girl, "she hurt her hands putting out a fire just now. I expect my father gave her the money for that. But she must have burnt her hands *dreffully!*"—Dicky had not quite outgrown his infantile lisp—"and if she's come for stuff to put on them, please I want to pay for it."

"But I don't want you to," put in the girl, still hesitating by the counter.

"But I'd *rather*," insisted Dicky.

"Tut!" said the drug-seller. "A matter of twopence won't break either of us. Captain Vyell's boy, are you? Well, then, I'll take your coppers on principle."

He counted out the change, and Dicky—who was not old enough yet to do sums—pretended to find it correct. But he was old enough to have acquired charming manners, and after thanking the drug-seller,

gave the girl quite a grown-up little bow as he passed out.

She would have followed, but the man said, "Stay a moment. What's your name?"

"Ruth Josselin."

"Age?"

"I was sixteen last month."

"Then listen to a word of advice, Ruth Josselin, and don't you take money like that from fine gentlemen like the Collector. They don't give it to the ugly ones, understand?"

"Thank you," she said. "I am going to give it back;" and slipping the guinea into her pocket she said "Good evening," and walked swiftly out in the wake of the child.

The drug-seller looked after her shrewdly. He was a moral man.

Ruth, hurrying out upon the sidewalk, descried the child a few paces up the road. He had come to a halt; was, in fact, plucking up his courage to go and demand the bird-cage. She overtook him.

"I was sent out to look for you," she said. "I oughtn't to have wasted time buying that ointment; but my hands were hurting me. Please, you are to come home and change your clothes for dinner."

"I'll come in a minute," said Dicky, "if you'll stand here and wait."

He might be called by that word again; and without knowing why, he dreaded her hearing it. She waited while he trotted forward, nerving himself to face the crowd again. Lo! when he reached the booth, all the bystanders had melted away. The bird-seller was covering up his cages with loose wrappers, making ready to pack up for the night.

"Hello!" he said cheerfully. "Thought I'd lost you for good."

He took the child's money, and handed the canary cage across the sill; also the bird-whistle, wrapped in a scrap of paper. Many times in the course of a career which brought him much fighting and some little fame, Dicky Vyell remembered this his first lesson in courage —that if you walk straight up to an enemy, as likely as not you find him vanished.

But he had not quite reached the end of his alarms. As he took the cage, a parrot at the back of the booth uplifted his voice and squawked,—

"No prerogative! No prerogative! No prerogative!"

"You mustn't mind *him*," said the bird-seller genially. "He's like the crowd—picks up a cry an' harps on it without understandin'."

Master Dicky understood it no better; but thanked the man and ran back, prize in hand, to rejoin the girl.

They hurried back to the Inn. At the gateway she paused.

"I let you say what was wrong just now," she explained. "Your father didn't give me that money for putting out the fire."

Here she hesitated. Dicky could not think what it mattered, or why her voice was so timid.

"Oh," said he carelessly, "I daresay it was just because he liked you. Father has plenty of money."

CHAPTER IV

FATHER AND SON

THE dinner set before Captain Vyell comprised a dish of oysters, a fish chowder, a curried crab, a fried fowl with white sauce, a saddle of tenderest mutton, and various sweets over which Manasseh had thrown the elegant flourishes of his art. The wine came from the Rhone valley—a Hermitage of the Collector's own shipment. The candles that lit the repast stood in the Collector's own silver candlesticks. As an old Roman general carried with him on foreign service, packed in panniers on mule-back, a tessellated pavement to be laid down for him at each camping halt and repacked when the troops moved forward, so did Captain Vyell on his progresses of inspection travel with all the apparatus of a good table.

Dicky, seated opposite his father in a suit of sapphire blue velvet with buttons of cut steel, partook only of the fried fowl and of a syllabub. He had his glass of wine too, and sipped at it, not liking it much, but encouraged by his father, who held that a fine palate could not be cultivated too early.

By some process of dishing-up best known to him-

self (but with the aid, no doubt, of the "dam scullion") Manasseh, who had cooked the dinner, also served it; noiselessly, wearing white gloves because his master abominated the sight of a black hand at meals. These gloves had a fascination for Dicky. They attracted his eyes as might the intervolved play of two large white moths in the penumbra beyond the candlelight, between his father's back and the dark sideboard; but he fought against the attraction because he knew that to be aware of a servant was an offence against good manners at table.

His father encouraged him to talk, and he told of his purchase—but not all the story. Not for worlds—instinct told him—must he mention the word he had heard spoken. Yet he got so far as to say—

"The people here don't like us—do they, father?"

Captain Vyell laughed. "No, that's very certain. And, to tell you the truth, if I had known you were wandering the street by yourself I might have felt uneasy. Manasseh shall take you for a walk to-morrow. One can never be sure of the *canaille*."

"What does that mean?"

Captain Vyell explained. The *canaille*, he said, were the common folk, whose part in this world was to be ruled. He explained further that to belong to the upper or ruling class it did not suffice to be well-born (though this was almost essential); one must also cultivate the manners proper to that station, and appear,

as well as be, a superior. Nor was this all; there were complications, which Dicky would learn in time; what was called "popular rights" for instance—rights which even a King must not be allowed to override; and these were so precious that (added the Collector) the upper classes must sometimes fight and lay down their lives for them.

Dick perpended. He found this exceedingly interesting, the more so because it came, though in a curiously different way, to much the same as Miss Quiney had taught him out of the catechism. Miss Quiney had used pious words; in Miss Quiney's talk everything—even to sitting upright at table, was mixed up with God and an all-seeing Eye; and his father—with a child's deadly penetration Dicky felt sure of it—was careless about God.

This, by the way, had often puzzled and even frightened him. God, like a great Sun, loomed so largely through Miss Quiney's scheme of things (which it were more precise, perhaps, to term a fog) that for certain, and apart from the sin of it and the assurance of going to hell, every one removed from God must be sitting in pitch-darkness. But lo! when his father talked everything became clear and distinct; there was no sun at all to be seen, but there was also no darkness. On the contrary, a hundred things grew visible at once, and intelligible and common-sensible as Miss Quiney never contrived to present them.

This was puzzling; and moreover, the child could not tolerate the thought of his father's going to hell—to the flames and unbearable thirst of it. To be sure Miss Quiney had never hinted this punishment for her employer, or even a remote chance of it, and Dicky's good breeding had kept him from confronting her major premise with the particular instance of his father, although the conclusion of that syllogism meant everything to him. Or it may be that he was afraid. . . . Once, indeed, like Sindbad in the cave, he had seen a glimmering chance of escape. It came when, reading in his Scripture lesson that Christ consorted by choice with publicans and sinners, he had been stopped by Miss Quiney with the information that "publican" meant "a kind of tax-collector." "Like papa?" asked the child, and held his breath for the answer. "Oh, not in the least like your dear papa," Miss Quiney made haste to assure him; "but a quite low class of person, and, I should say, connected rather with the Excise. You must remember that all this happened in the East, a long time ago." Poor soul! the conscientiousness of her conscience (so to speak) had come to rest upon turning such corners genteelly, and had grown so expert at it that she scarcely breathed a sigh of relief. The child bent his head over the book. His eyes were hidden from her, and she never guessed what hope she had dashed.

It was a relief then—after being forced at one time

or another to put aside or pigeon-hole a hundred questions on which Miss Quiney's teaching and his father's practice appeared at variance—to find a point upon which the certainty of both converged. Heaven and hell might be this or that but in this world the poor deserved their place, and must be kept to it.

"That seems fine," said Dicky, after a long pause.

"What seems fine?" His father, tasting the mutton with approval, had let slip his clue to the child's thought.

"Why, that poor people have rights too, and we ought to stand up for them—like you said," answered Dicky, not too grammatically.

"They are our rights too, you see," said his father.

Dicky did not see; but his eagerness jumped this gap in the argument. "Papa," he asked with a sudden flush, "did you ever stand up to a King on the poor people's side, and fight—and all that?"

"Well, you see"—the Collector smiled—"I was never called upon. But it's in the blood. Has Miss Quiney ever told you about Oliver Cromwell?"

"Yes. He cut off King Charles's head. . . . I don't think Miss Quiney liked him for that, though she didn't say so."

The Collector was still smiling. "He certainly helped to cut off King Charles's head, and—right or wrong—it's remembered against him. But he did any amount of great things, too. He was a masterful

man; and perhaps the reason why Miss Quiney held her tongue is that he happens to be an ancestor of ours, and she knew it."

"Oliver Cromwell?" Dicky repeated the name slowly, with awe.

"He was my great-great-grandfather, and you can add on another 'great' for yourself. I am called Oliver after him. They even say," added Captain Vyell, sipping his wine, "that I have some of his features; and so, perhaps, will you when you grow up. But of your chance of that you shall judge before long. I am having a copy of his portrait sent over from England."

For a moment or two these last remarks scarcely penetrated to the boy's hearing. Like all boys, he naturally desired greatness; unlike most, he was conscious of standing above the crowd, but without a guess that he derived the advantage from anything better than accident. His father had the good fortune to be rich. For himself—well, Dicky was born with one of those simple natures that incline rather to distrust than to overrate their own merits. None the less he desired and loved greatness—thus early, and throughout his life—and it came as a tremendous, a magnificent shock to him that he enjoyed it as a birthright. The repetition of "great"—"he was my great-great-grandfather;" "you can add another 'great' for yourself" —hummed in his ears. A full half a minute ticked

by before he grasped at the remainder of his father's speech, and, like a breaking twig, it dropped him to bathos.

"But—but—" Dicky passed a hand over his face. "Miss Quiney said that Oliver Cromwell was covered with warts!"

Captain Vyell laughed outright.

"Women have wonderful ways of conveying a prejudice. Warts? Well, there, at any rate, we have the advantage of old Noll." The Collector, whose sense of hearing was acute and fastidious, broke off with a sharp arching of the eyebrows and a glance up at the ceiling, or rather (since ceiling there was none), at the oaken beams which supported the floor overhead. "Manasseh," he said quickly, "be good enough to step upstairs and inform our landlady that the pitch of her voice annoys me. She would seem to be rating a servant girl above."

"Yes, sah."

"Then desire her to take the girl away and scold her elsewhere."

Manasseh disappeared, and returned two minutes later saying "the woman would give no furdah trouble." He removed the white cloth, set out the decanters with an apology for the mahogany's indifferent polish, and withdrew again to prepare his master's coffee.

At once a silence fell between father and son. Dicky had expected to hear more of Oliver Cromwell. He

stared across the dull shine of the table at his parent's coat of peach-coloured velvet and shirt front of frilled linen; at the lace ruffle on the wrist, the signet ring on the little finger, the hand—firm, but fine—as it reached for a decanter or fell to playing with a gold toothpick. He loved this father of his with the helpless, concentred love of a motherless child; admired him, as all must admire, only more loyally. To feel constraint in so magnificent a presence was but natural.

It would have astonished him to learn that his father, lolling there so easily and toying with a toothpick, shared that constraint. Yet it was so. Captain Vyell did not understand children. Least of all did he understand this son of his begetting. Could be kind to him, even extravagantly, by fits and starts; desired to be kind constantly; could rally and chat with him in presence of a third person, though that third person was but a servant waiting at table. But to sit alone facing the boy and converse with him was a harder business, and gave him an absurd feeling of *gêne;* and this (though possibly he did not know it) was the real reason why, having brought Dicky in the coach for a treat, he himself had ridden all day in saddle.

Dicky was the first to resume conversation.

"Papa," he asked, still pondering the problem of rich and poor, "don't some of the old families die out?"

"They do."

"Then others must come up to take their place, or the people who do the ruling would come to an end."

"That's the way of it, my boy." The Collector nodded and cracked a walnut. "New families spring up; and a devilish ugly show they usually make of it at first. It takes three generations, they say, to breed a gentleman; and, in my opinion, that's under the mark."

"And a lady?"

"Women are handier at picking up appearances; 'adaptable''s the word. But the trouble with them is to find out whether they have the real thing or not. For my part, if you want the real thing, I believe there are more gentlemen than gentlewomen in the world; and Batty Langton says you may breed out the old Adam, but you'll never get rid of Eve. But, bless my soul, Dicky, it's early days for you to be discussing the sex!"

Dicky, however, was perfectly serious.

"But I *do* mean what you call the real thing, papa. Couldn't a poor girl be born so that she had it from the start? Oh, I can't tell what I mean exactly—"

"On the contrary, child, you are putting it uncommonly well; at any rate, you are making me understand what you mean, and that's the A and Z of it, whether in talk or in writing. 'Is there—can there be—such a thing as a natural born lady?' that's your question, hey?" The Collector peeled his walnut and smiled

to himself. In other company—Batty Langton, for example—he would have answered cynically that to him the phenomenon of a natural born lady would first of all suggest a doubt of her mother's virtue. "Well, no," he answered after a while; "if you met such a person, and could trace back her family history, ten to one you'd discover good blood somewhere in the family. Old stocks fail, die away underground, and, as time goes on, are forgotten; then one fine day up springs a shoot nobody can account for. It's the old sap taking a fresh start. See?"

Dicky nodded. It would take him some time to work out the theory, but he liked the look of it.

His drowsed young brain—for the hour was past bedtime—applied it idly to a picture that stood out, sharp and vivid, from the endless train of the day's impressions: the picture of a girl with quiet, troubled eyes, composed lips, and hands that beat upon a blazing curtain, not flinching at the pain. And just then, as it were in a dream, the beat of her hands echoed in a soft tapping, the door behind his father opened gently, and Dicky sat up with a start, wide awake again and staring, for the girl herself stood in the doorway.

CHAPTER V

RUTH

"HEY, what is it?" the Collector demanded, slewing himself to the half-about in his chair.

The girl stepped forward into the candle-light. Over her shoulders she wore a faded plaid, the ends of which her left hand clutched and held together at her bosom.

"Your Honour's pardon for troubling," she said, and laying a gold coin on the table, drew back with a slight curtsy. "But I think you gave me this by mistake; and now is my only chance to give it back. I am going home in a few minutes."

The Collector glanced at the coin, and from that to the girl's face, on which his eyes lingered.

"Gad, I recollect!" he said. "You were the wench that pulled off my boots?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, upon my honour, I forget at this moment if I gave it by mistake or because of your face. No, hang me!" he went on, as she flushed, not angrily, but as though the words hurt her, "it must have been by

mistake. I couldn't have forgot so much better a reason."

To this she answered nothing, but put forward her hand as if to push the coin nearer.

"Certainly not," said he, still with eyes on her face. "I wish you to take it. By the way, I heard the landlady's voice just now, letting loose upon somebody. Was it on you?"

"Yes."

"And you are going home to-night, you say. Has she turned you out?"

"Yes." The girl's hand moved as if gathering the plaid closer over her bosom. Her voice held no resentment. Her eyes were fixed upon the coin, which, however, she made no further motion to touch; and this downward glance showed at its best the lovely droop of her long eyelashes.

The Collector continued to take stock of her, and with a growing wonder.

The lower half of the face's oval was perhaps unduly gaunt and a trifle overweighted by the broad brow. The whole body stood a thought too high for its breadth, with a hint of coltishness in the thin arms and thick elbow-joints. So judged the Collector, as he would have appraised a slave or any young female animal; while as a connoisseur he knew that these were faults pointing towards ultimate perfection, and at this stage even necessary to it.

For assurance he asked her, "How old are you?"

"Sixteen."

"That's as I guessed," said he, and added to himself, "My God, this is going to be one of the loveliest things in creation!" Still, as she bent her eyes to the coin on the table, he ran his appraising glance over her neck and shoulders, judging—so far as the ugly shawl permitted—the head's poise, the set of the coral ear, the delicate wave of hair on the neck's nape.

"Why is she turning you out?"

"A window curtain took fire. She said it was my fault."

"But it was not your fault at all!" cried Dicky. "Papa, the curtain took fire in my room, and she beat it out. The whole house might have been burnt down but for her. She beat it out, and made nothing of it, though it hurt her horribly. Look at her hands, papa."

"Hold out your hands," his father commanded.

She stretched them out. The ointment, as she turned them palms upward, shone under the candle rays.

"Turn them the other way," he commanded, after a long look at them. The words might mean that the sight afflicted him, but his tone scarcely suggested this. She turned her hands, and he scrutinized the backs of them very deliberately. "It's a shame," said he at length.

"Of course it's a shame!" the boy agreed hotly. "Papa, won't you ring for the landlady and tell her so, and then she won't be sent away."

"My dear Dicky," his father answered, "you mistake. I was thinking that it was a shame to coarsen such hands with housework." He eyed the girl again, and she met him with a straight face—flushed a little and plainly perturbed, but not shrinking—although her bosom heaved, for his admiration was entirely cool and critical. "What is your name?" he asked.

"Ruth Josselin."

He appeared to consider this for a moment, and then, reaching out a hand for the decanter, to dismiss the subject. "Well, pick up your guinea," he said. "No doubt the woman outside has treated you badly; but I can't intercede for you, to keep you a drudge here among the saucepans; no, upon my conscience, I can't. The fact is, Ruth Josselin, you have the makings of a beauty, and I'll be no party to spoiling 'em. What is more, it seems you have spirit, and no woman with beauty and spirit need fail to win her game in this world. That's my creed." He sipped his wine.

"If your Honour pleases," said the girl quietly, picking up the coin, "the woman called me bad names, and I was not wanting you at all to speak for me."

"Oho!" The Collector set down his glass and laughed. "So that's the way of it—'Nobody asked you, sir, she said.' Dicky, we sit rebuked."

"But—" she hesitated, and then went on rapidly in the lowest of low tones—"if your Honour wouldn't mind giving me silver instead of gold? They won't change gold for me in the town; they'll think I have stolen it. Most Sundays I'm allowed to take home broken meats to mother and grandfather, and to-night I shan't be given any, now that I'm sent away. They'll be expecting me, and indeed, sir, I can't bear to face them—or I wouldn't ask you. I beg your Honour's pardon for saying so much."

"Hullo!" exclaimed the Collector. "Why, yes, to be sure, you must be grandchild to the old man of the sea—him that I met on the beach this afternoon t'other side of the headland. Lives in a hovel with a woodpile beside it, and a daughter that looks out for wreckage?"

"Your Honour spoke with them?" Into Ruth's face there mounted a deeper tide of colour. But whereas the first flush had been dark with distress, this second spread with a glow of affection. Her eyes seemed to take light from it, and shone.

"I spoke with the old man. Since you have said so much, I may say more. I gave him food; he was starving."

She bent her head. Her hands moved a little, with a gesture most pitiful to see. "I was afraid," she muttered, "with these gales, and no getting to the oyster beds."

"He took some food, too, to his daughter, with a bottle of wine, as I remember."

A bright tear dropped. In the candle-light Dicky saw it splash on the back of her hand, by the wrist.

"God bless your Honour!" Dicky could just hear the words.

The door opened and Manasseh entered, bearing the coffee on a silver tray.

"Manasseh," said his master, "take that guinea and bring me change for it. If you have no silver in the treasury get the landlady to change it for you."

Manasseh was affronted. His hand came near to shaking as he poured and handed the coffee.

"Yo' Hon'ah doan off'n use de metal," he answered. "Dat's sho'. But whiles an' again yo' Hon'ah condescends ter want it. Dat bein' so, I keep it by me—*an'* polished. I doan fetch yo' Hon'ah w'at any low trash has handled."

He withdrew, leaving this fine shaft to rankle, and by and by entered with a small velvet bag, from the neck of which he shook a small cascade of silver coins, all exquisitely polished.

"Count me out change for a guinea," commanded his master.

Manasseh obeyed.

"Now empty the bag, put into it what you have counted, and sweep up the rest."

Manasseh dropped in the coins one by one, and

tied the neck of the bag with its silken ribbon. The Collector took it from him and tossed it to the girl.

"Here—catch!" said he carelessly.

But her burnt hands shrank from closing on it, and it fell to the floor. She stooped, recovered it, and slipped it within her bodice. As she rose erect again her eyes rested in wonder on the black servant who with a crumb-brush was sweeping the money off the table and catching it upon the coffee-salver. The rain and clash of the coins appeared to confuse her for a moment. Then with another curtsy and a "Thank your Honour," she moved to the door.

"But wait," said the Collector sharply, on a sudden thought. "You are not meaning to walk all the way home, surely?"

"Yes."

"At this hour?"

"The wind has gone down. I do not mind the dark, and the distance is nothing. . . . Oh, I forgot: your Honour thinks that, with all this money, some one will try to rob me?"

The Collector smiled. "You would appear to be a very innocent young woman," he said. "I was not, as a fact, thinking of the money."

"Nobody will guess that I am carrying so much," she said simply; "so it will be quite safe."

"Nevertheless this may help to give you confidence," said he. Feeling in the breast pocket of his laced satin

waistcoat, he drew forth a diminutive pistol—a delicate toy, with a pattern of silver foliated over the butt. "It is loaded," he explained, "and primed; though it cannot go off unless you pull back the trigger. At close quarters it can be pretty deadly. Do you understand firearms?"

"Grandfather has a fowling-piece," she answered; "and, now that his sight has failed, on Sundays I try to shoot sea-birds for him. He says that I have a good eye. But last week the birds had all flown inland, because of the gale."

"Then take this. It is nothing to carry, and you may feel the safer for it."

She put up a hand to decline. "Why should I need it?"

"We'll hope you will not. But do as I bid you, girl. I shall be passing back along the beach in two days' time, and will call for it."

She resisted no longer.

"I will take it," she said. "By that time I may have thought of words to thank your Honour."

She curtsied again.

"Manasseh!" Captain Vyell pointed to the door. The negro opened it and stood aside majestically as she passed out and was gone.

Let moralists perpend. Ruth Josselin had knocked at that door after a sharp struggle between conscience

and crying want. The poverty known to Ruth was of the extreme kind that gnaws the entrails with hunger. It had furthermore starved her childhood of religion, and her sole code of honour came to her by instinct. Yet she had knocked at the door with no thought but that the Collector's guinea had come to her hand by mistake, and no expectancy but that the Collector would thank her and take it back. She was shy, moreover. It had cost courage.

"Honesty is the best policy." True enough, no doubt. Yet, when all is said, but for some radical instinct of honesty, untaught, brave to conquer a more than selfish need, Ruth had never brought back her guinea. And, yet again, from that action all the rest of this story flows. When we have told it, let the moralists decide.

CHAPTER VI

PARENTHETICAL—OF THE FAMILY OF VYELL

Captain Oliver Vyell, as we have seen, set store upon pedigree: and here, as well in compliment to him as to make our story clearer, we will interrupt it with a brief account of his family and descent.

The tomb of Sir Thomas Vyell, second Baronet, at whose house of Carwithiel in Cornwall our Collector spent some years of his boyhood, may yet be seen in the church of that parish, in the family transept. It bears the coat of the Vyells (gules, a fesse raguly argent) with no less than twenty-four quarterings: for an Odo of the name had fought on the winning side at Hastings, and his descendants, settling in the West, had held estates there and been people of importance ever since.

The Wars of the Roses, to be sure, had left them under a cloud, shorn of the most of their wealth and a great part of their lands. Yet they kept themselves afloat (if this riot of metaphor may be pardoned) and their heads moderately high, until Sir William, the first Baronet, by developing certain tin mines on his estate and working them by new processes, set up the family fortunes once more.

His son, Sir Thomas, steadily bettered them. A contemporary narrative describes him as "chief of a very good Cornish family, with a very good estate. His marrying a grand-daughter of the Lord Protector (Oliver) first recommended him to King William, who at the Revolution made him Commissioner of the Excise and some years after Governor of the Post Office. . . . The Queen, by reason of his great capacity and honesty, hath continued him in the office of Postmaster. He is a gentleman of a sweet, easy, affable disposition—a handsome man, of middle stature, towards forty years old." This was written in 1713. Sir Thomas died in 1726, of the smallpox, having issue (by his one wife, who survived him but a few years) seven sons and three daughters.

1. Thomas, the third Baronet: of whom anon.

2. William, who became a Senior Student of Christ Church, Oxford, a page to Queen Mary, and a Fellow of the Royal Society. A memoir of the time preserves him for us as "a tall sanguine man, with a merry eye and talkative in his cups." He married a Walpole, but his children died young.

3. John, who, going on a diplomatic mission to Hamburg, took a fever and died there, unmarried.

4. Henry, the father of our Collector. He married Jane, second daughter of the Marquis of Lomond; increased his wealth in Bengal as governor of the East India Company's Factory, and while yet increasing it,

died at Calcutta in 1728. His children were two sons, Oliver and Henry, with both of whom our story deals.

5. Algernon, who went to Jesus College, Cambridge, became a Fellow there, practised severe parsimony and dying unmarried in 1742, had his eyes closed by his college gyp and weighted with two penny-pieces—the only coins found in his breeches' pocket. He left his very considerable savings to young Oliver, whom he had never seen.

6. Frederick Penwarne, barrister-at-law. We shall have something to do with him.

7. Roger, who traded at Calcutta and making an expedition to the Persian Gulf, was killed there in a chance affray with some Arabs.

8. Anne, who married Sackville.

9. Frances Elizabeth, who married Pelham.

10. Arabella, whose affections went astray upon a young Cornish yeoman. Her family interfering, the match was broken off and she died unmarried.

Oliver and Henry, born at Calcutta, were for their health's sake sent home together—the one aged four, the other three—to be nurtured at Carwithiel. Here under the care of their grand-parents Sir Thomas and Lady Vyell (the Protector's grand-daughter), they received instruction at the hands—often very literally at the hands—of the Rev. Isaac Toplady, Curate in Charge of Carwithiel, a dry scholar, a wet fly-fisher,

and something of a toad-eater. They had for sole playmate and companion their Cousin Diana, or Di, the seven-year-old daughter of their eldest uncle Thomas, heir to the estates and the baronetcy.

This Thomas—a dry peevish man, averse from country pursuits, penurious and incurably suspicious of all his fellow-men—now occupied after a fashion and with fair diligence that place in public affairs from which his father had, on approach of age, withdrawn. He sat in Parliament for the family borough of St. Michael, and by family influence had risen to be a Lord in the Admiralty. He had married Lady Caroline Pett, a daughter of the first Earl of Portlemouth, and the pair kept house in Arlington Street, where during the session they entertained with a frugality against which Lady Caroline fought in vain. They were known (and she was aware of it) as "Pett and Petty," and her life was embittered by the discovery, made too late, that her husband was in every sense a mean man, who would never rise and never understand why not, while he nursed an irrational grudge against her for having presented him with a daughter and then ceased from child-bearing.

Unless she repented and procured him a male heir, the baronetcy would come to him only to pass at his death to young Oliver; and the couple, who spent all the Parliamentary recesses at Carwithiel because Mr. Thomas found it cheap, bore no good will to that young

gentleman. He *en revanche* supplied them with abundant food for censure, being wilful from the first, and given in those early years to consorting with stable-boys and picking up their manners and modes of speech. The uncle and aunt alleged—and indeed it was obvious—that the unruly boys passed on the infection to Miss Diana. Miss Diana never accompanied her parents to London, but had grown up from the first at Carwithiel—again because Mr. Thomas found it cheap.

In this atmosphere of stable slang, surrounded by a sort of protective outer aura in their grand-parents' godliness, the three children grew up: mischievous indeed and without rein, but by no means vicious. Their first separation came in 1726 when Master Oliver, now rising ten, left for London, to be entered at Westminster School. Harry was to follow him, and did, in a twelvemonth's time; but just before this happened, in Oliver's summer holidays, Sir Thomas took the smallpox and died and went to his tomb in the Carwithiel transept. Harry took it too; but pulled through, not much disfigured. Oliver and Diana escaped.

The boys, to whom their grandfather—so far as they regarded him at all—had mainly presented himself as a benevolent old proser, were surprised to find that they sincerely regretted him; and the events of the next few weeks threw up his merits (now that the time was past for rewarding them) into a sharp light which memory overarched with a halo. Tenderly into that halo

dissolved his trivial faults—his trick, for example, of snoring between the courses at dinner, or of awaking and pulling his fingers till they cracked with a distressing sound. These and other small frailties were forgotten as the new Sir Thomas and his spouse took possession and proceeded in a few weeks to turn the place inside out, dismissing five of the stable-boys, cutting down the garden staff by one-third, and carrying havoc into the housekeepers' apartments, the dairy, the still-room.

In these dismissals I have no doubt that Sir Thomas and Lady Caroline hit (as justice is done in this world) upon the chief blackguards. But the two boys, asking one another why So-and-so had been marked down while This-other had been spared, and observing that the So-and-so's included an overbalancing number of their own cronies, found malice in the discrimination, and a malice directed with intent upon themselves.

Young Oliver, as soon as Harry was convalescent, discussed this vehemently with him. Harry, weak with illness, took it passively. He was destined for the Navy. To him already the sea meant everything: as a child of three, on his voyage home in the *Mogul* East Indiaman, he had caught the infection of it; on it, as offering the only career fit for a grown man, his young thoughts brooded, and these annoyances were to him but as chimney-pots and pantiles falling about the heads of folks ashore. But he agreed that Di's conduct needed

explaining. She had taken a demure turn, and was not remonstrating with her parents as she ought—not playing fair, in short. "It must be pretty difficult for her," said Harry. "I don't see," said Oliver.

The two boys went back to Westminster together. They spent the Christmas holidays with their Uncle Frederick, the barrister, who practised very little at the law either in court or in chambers, but dwelt somewhat luxuriously in the Inner Temple and lived the life of a man about town. Their summer vacation was to be spent at Carwithiel; but, as it happened, they were not to see Carwithiel again, for before summer came news of their father's death at Calcutta. He had amassed a fortune which, translated out of rupees, amounted to £400,000. To his widow, in addition to her jointure, he left a life interest of a thousand pounds *per annum;* a sum of £20,000 was set aside for Harry, to accumulate until his twenty-first birthday; while the magnificent residue in like manner accumulated for young Oliver, the heir.

Lady Jane returned to England, to live in decent affluence at Bath; and at Bath, of course, Oliver and Harry spent their subsequent holidays, while their Uncle Frederick continued by occasional dinners and gifts of pocket money, by outings down the river to Greenwich, by seats at the theatre, or at state shows and pageants, to mitigate the rigours of school. Had it occurred to Oliver Vyell in later life to set down his "Reflections"

in the style of the emperor Marcus Aurelius, he might have begun them in such words as these: "From my mother, Lady Jane Vyell, I learned to be proud of good birth, to esteem myself a gentleman, and to regulate my actions by a code proper to my station in life. This code she reconciled with the Gospels, and indeed, she rested it on the rock of Holy Scripture. From my Uncle Frederick I learned that self-interest was the key of life; that the teachings of the priesthood were more or less conscious humbug; that all men could be bought; that their god was vanity, and the Great Revolution the noblest event in English history—"

The sane infusion of Father Neptune in Master Harry's blood preserved him from these doctrines, and before long indeed removed him out of the way of hearing them. Soon after his fifteenth birthday he sailed to learn his profession—shipping (by a fiction of the service), as "cabin boy" under his mother's brother, Lord Robert Soules, then commanding the *Merope* frigate.

Oliver proceeded to Christ Church, Oxford, and thence (without waiting for a degree) to make the Grand Tour; in the course of which and in company with his cousin, Dick Pelham, and a Mr. Batty Langton, a Christ Church friend, he visited Florence, Rome, Naples, Athens, and Constantinople, returning through Rome again and by way of Venice, Switzerland, Paris. He reached home to find that his mother, who believed in keeping young men employed, had procured him a

cornetcy in Lord Lomond's Troop of Horse. He was now in possession of an ample fortune. He would certainly succeed to the baronetcy and to the Vyell acres, which were mostly entailed.

But the grave itself could not give lessons in greed to a true Whig family of that period. Lady Jane had it in her blood, every tradition of it. Her son (though within a few months he rose to command of a troop) detested all military routine save active service. He despised the triumphs of the Senate. To keep him out of mischief—or, rather, as you shall hear, to extricate him from it—the good dame made application to the Duke of Newcastle; and so in the year 1737, at the age of twenty-one, Captain Oliver Vyell was appointed to the lucrative post of Collector to the port of Boston.

He had held it, now, for close upon seven years.

CHAPTER VII

A SABBATH-BREAKER

Now, in his twenty-eighth year, Oliver Vyell, handsome of face, standing six feet two inches in his stockings, well built and of iron constitution, might fairly be called a sensual man, but not fairly a sensualist. The distinction lay in his manliness. He was a man, every inch of him.

He enjoyed hard riding even more than hard gaming, and far more than hard drinking; courted fatigue as a form of bodily indulgence; would tramp from twenty to thirty miles in any weather on a chance of sport; loved the bite of the wind, the shock of cold water; and was a bold swimmer in a generation that shunned the exercise.

He awoke the next morning to find the sun shining in on his window after a boisterous night. He looked at his watch and rang a small bell that stood on the table by his bed. Within ten seconds Manasseh appeared, and was commanded first to draw up the blind and then, though the hour was early, to bring shaving-water with all speed.

While the negro went on his errand Captain Vyell arose, slipped on his dressing-gown, and strolled to the window. It looked upon the ocean, over a clean stretch of beach that ran northwest, starting from the pier-head of the harbour and fringing the town's outskirt. Half a dozen houses formed this outskirt or suburb—decent weather-boarded houses standing in their own gardens along a curved cliff overlooking the beach. The beach was of hardest sand, and just beneath the Collector's window so level that it served for a second bowling-green, or ten-pin alley. Thus it ran out for some twenty rods and then shelved abruptly. Captain Vyell, who had an eye for such phenomena, judged that this bank had formed itself quite recently, since the building of the pier.

A heavy sea was running, and evidently with a strong undertow. When Manasseh returned with the hot water, Captain Vyell announced that he would bathe before taking his chocolate.

"Yo' Hon'ah will bathe befor' shaving?"

"You d——d fool, did you ever know me do *any*-thing before shaving?"

Manasseh chose a razor, stropped it, and worked the shaving soap into a lather.

"Beggin' yo' Hon'ah's pardon," said he, "it bein' de Lawd's Day, an' these Port Nassau people dam' ig'orant——"

"Hand me the *peignoir*," commanded his master sharply.

He sat, and was shaved. Then, having sponged his chin, he ordered Manasseh to lay out his bathing-dress, retire, find a back way to the beach and, having opened all the doors, attend him below. He indued himself in his bathing-dress very deliberately, standing up for a minute stark naked in the sunshine flooding through the open window—a splendid figure, foretasting battle with the surf.

Then, having drawn on his bathing-dress and thrust his feet into sand-shoes, he cast his dressing-gown again over him and went down the stairs at a run. The doors stood open, and on the beach the negro awaited him in the right attitude of "attention." To him he tossed his wrap and shoes, and ran down to the beach as might swift-footed Achilles have run to be clasped by the Sea-Goddess his mother.

Through the shallow wavelets he ran, stepping high and delicately splashing merry drops against the morning sunlight, leaped over one or two that would have "tilled" him to the knee (to use an old boyish phrase learnt at Carwithiel where he had learnt to swim), and came to the shelf beyond which the first tall comber boomed towards him, more than head high, hissing along its ridge. There, as it over-arched him, he launched his body forward and shot through the transparent green, emerging beyond the white smother

with a thrill and a laugh of sheer physical delight. Thrice he repeated this,—

> "Like a dive-dapper peering through a wave,
> Who, being look'd on, ducks as quickly in. . ."

passed the fourth wave, gained deep water, and thrust out to sea with a steady breast-stroke, his eyes all the while on the great embracing flood which, stretch as it might from here to Europe, for the moment he commanded.

Manasseh watched him from the beach. From the cliff above two scandalised householders calling to one another across their gardens' boundary pointed seaward and summoned their families to the windows to note the reprobate swimmer and a Sabbath profaned.

The eyes of a long-shore population are ever on the sea from which comes their livelihood, and nothing on the sea escapes them long. The Collector's head by this time was but a speck bobbing on the waves, but ere he turned back for shore maybe two hundred of Port Nassau's population were watching, from various points. The Port Nassauers, whatever their individual frailties, were sternly religious—nine-tenths of them from conviction or habit, the rest in self-defence—and Sabbatarians to a man. The sight of that heathen slave, Manasseh, waiting on the beach with a bath-gown over his arm, incensed them to fury. Growls were uttered, here and there, that if the authorities

knew their business this law-breaker—for Sabbath-breaking was an indictable offence—should be seized on landing, haled naked to justice, and clapped in the town stocks; but fortunately this indignation had no concert and found, for the moment, no leader.

The Collector having swum out more than half a mile, turned and sped back, using a sharp side-stroke now with a curving arm that cleft the ridges like the fin of a fish. His feet touched earth, and he ran up through the pursuing breakers—a fleet-footed Achilles again, glittering from the bath. Manasseh hurried down to throw his mantle over the godlike man.

"Towel me here," was the panting command. And lo! slipping off his bathing-dress and standing naked to the sea, Captain Vyell was towelled under the eyes of Port Nassau, and flesh-brushed until he glowed (it may be) as healthily as did the cheeks of those who spied on him. On this question the Muse declines to take sides.

For certain his naked body, after these ministrations, glowed delicious within the bath-gown as he mounted again to his Olympian chamber. There he allowed Manasseh to wash out his locks in fresh water (the Collector had a fine head of hair, of a waved brown, and detested a wig), to anoint them and tie them behind with a fresh black ribbon. This done, he took his clothes one by one as Manasseh handed them, and arrayed himself, humming the while an air from Opera,

and thus unconsciously committing a second offence against the Sabbath.

He descended to find Dicky already seated at table, awaiting him. Dicky had slept like a top in spite of the strange bed; and awaking soon after daybreak, had lain cosily listening to the boom of the sea. To him this holiday was a glorious interlude in the régime of Miss Quiney. His handsome father did not kiss him, but merely patted him on the shoulder as he passed to his chair; and to Dick (though he would have liked a kiss) it seemed just the right manly thing to do.

They talked merrily while Manasseh brought in the breakfast dishes—for Master Dicky bread-and-milk followed by a simple steak of cod—a bewildering succession of chowder, omelet, devilled kidneys, cold ham, game pie and fruit for the Collector, who professed himself keen-set as a hunter, and washed down the viands with a tankard of cider. He described his bathe and promised Dicky that he should have his first swimming lessons next summer. "I must talk about you to your Uncle Harry. Craze for the sea? At your age if he saw a puddle of water he must stick his toes in it. He's cruising just now, off South Carolina, keeping a look-out for guardacostas. He'll render an account of them, you may be sure. He writes that he may be coming up Boston way any time now. Oh, I can swim, but for diving you should see your Uncle Harry—off the yard-arm—body like a whip—nothing

like it in any of the old Greeks' statues—plenty of talk about bathing; but diving? No. In the east, must go south to the Persian Gulf to see diving. The god Hermes descending on Ogygia—if you could imagine that, you had Uncle Harry—the shoot outwards, the delicate curve to a straight slant, heels rising above rigid body while you counted, begad! holding your breath. Then the plumb drop, like a gannet's——"

Dicky listened, glorious vistas opening before him. With the fruit Manasseh brought coffee; and still the boy sat entranced while his father chatted, glowing with exercise and enjoying a breakfast at every point excellent.

It was the merest thoughtlessness, no doubt, that having arranged for Dicky's morning walk, and after smoking a tobacco leaf rolled with an art of which Manasseh possessed the secret, the Collector so timed his message to the stables that his groom brought the horse Bayard around to the inn door just as the Sabbath bells began tolling for divine worship. For as a sceptic he was careless rather than militant; ridiculing religion only in his own set, and when occasion arose, and then without fanaticism. For such piety as his mother's he had even a tolerant respect; and in any event had too much breeding to affront of set purpose the godly townsfolk of Port Nassau. At the first note of the bells he frowned and blamed himself for not having

started earlier. But he had already made appointment by letter to meet the Surveyor and the Assistant Surveyor at noon on the headland, to measure out and discuss the site of the proposed fortification; and he was a punctilious man in observing engagements.

It may be asked how, if civil to other men's scruples, he had come to make such an appointment for the Sabbath. He had answered this and (as he hoped) with suitable apologies in his letter to the surveyor, Mr. Wapshott: explaining that as His Majesty's business was bringing him to Port Nassau, so it obliged him to be back at Boston by such-and-such a date. He was personally unacquainted with this Mr. Wapshott, who had omitted the courtesy of calling upon him at the Bowling Green, and whom by consequence he was inclined to set down as a person of defective manners. But Mr. Wapshott was, after all, in the King's service and would understand its exigencies.

He mounted therefore and rode up the street. The roadway was deserted; but along the sidewalk, sober families, marching by twos and threes, turned their heads at the sound of Bayard's hoofs on the cobbles. The Collector set his face and passed them with a grave look, as of one absorbed in affairs of moment. Nevertheless, coming to the whitewashed Church where the streams of worshippers converged and choking the porchway overflowed upon the street, he added the courtesy of doffing his hat as he rode by. He did this

still with a set face, looking straight between Bayard's ears; but with the tail of his eye caught one glimpse of a little comedy which puzzled and amused him.

A small rotund, red-gilled man, in bearing and aspect not unlike a turkey-cock, was mounting the steps of the portico. Behind this personage sailed an ample lady of middle age, with a bevy of younger damsels—his spouse and daughters doubtless. Suddenly—and as if, at sight of the Collector, a whisper passed among them—the middle-aged lady shot out a hand, arrested her husband by the coat-tail and drew him down a step, while the daughters ranged themselves in semicircle around him, spreading their skirts and together effacing him from view, much as a hen covers her offspring.

The Collector laughed inwardly as he replaced his hat, and rode on speculating what this bit of by-play might mean. But it had passed out of his thoughts before he came to the outskirts of the town.

CHAPTER VIII

ANOTHER SABBATH-BREAKER

THE road—the same by which he had arrived last night—mounted all the way and led across the neck of the headland. His business, however, lay out upon the headland itself and almost at its extremest verge; and a mile above the town he struck off to the left where a bridle-path climbed by a long slant to the ridge. Half an hour's easy riding brought him to the top of the ascent, whence he looked down on the long beach he had travelled yesterday. The sea lay spread on three sides of him. Its salt breeze played on his face; and the bay, feeling the tickle of it in his nostrils, threw up his head with a whinny. "Good, old boy—is it not?" asked the Collector, patting his neck. "Suppose we try a breather of it?"

The chine of the headland—of turf, short-cropped by the unceasing wind—stretched smooth as a race-course for close upon a mile, with a gentle dip midway much like the hollow of a saddle. The Collector ran his eye along it in search of the two men he had come to meet, but could spy neither of them.

"Sheltering somewhere from the breeze, maybe,"

he decided. "*We* don't mind it, hey? Come along, lad—here's wine for heroes."

He touched Bayard with the spur, and the good horse started at a gallop—a rollicking gallop and in the very tune of his master's mood; and if all Port Nassau had not been at its devotions, the chins of its burghers might have tilted themselves in wonder at the apparition—a Centaur, enlarged upon the skyline.

Man and horse at full stretch of the gallop were launching down the dip of the hollow—the wind singing past on the top note of exhilaration—when the bay, too well trained to shy, faltered a moment and broke his stride, as a figure started up from the lee-side of the ridge.

The Collector sailing past and throwing a glance over his shoulder, saw the figure and lifted a hand. In another ten strides he reined up the bay, turned, and came back at a walk.

He confronted a lean, narrow-chested young man, black-suited, pale of face, with watery eyes, straw-coloured eyelashes and an underbred smile that twitched between timidity and assurance.

"Ah?" queried the Collector, eyeing him, and disliking him at sight. "Are you"—doubtfully—"by any chance Mr. Wapshott, the Surveyor?"

"No such luck," answered the watery-eyed young man with an offhand attempt at familiarity. "I'm his Assistant—name of Banner—Wapshott's unwell."

"I beg your pardon?"

"Mr.—Mr. Wapshott—sends word that he's unwell." Under the Collector's eye the youth suddenly shifted his manner and became respectful.

"I beg your pardon?" the Collector repeated slowly. "He 'sends word,' do you say? I had not the honour at my inn—from which I have ridden straight—to be notified of Mr. Wapshott's indisposition."

Mr. Banner attempted a weak grin and harked back again to familiarity.

"No, I guess not. The fact is——"

"Excuse me; but would you mind taking your hands out of your pockets?"

"Oh, come! Why?" But none the less Mr. Banner removed them.

"Thank you. You were saying?"

"Well, I guess, between you and me—" Mr. Banner's hands were slipping to his pockets again but he checked the motion and rested a palm nonchalantly on either hip—"the old man was a bit too God-fearing to sign to it."

"You mean," the Collector asked slowly, "that he is not, in fact, unwell, but has asked you to convey an untruth?"

"You've a downright way of putting it—er—sir," Mr. Banner confessed; "but you get near enough, I shouldn't wonder. You see, the old—the Surveyor is strict upon Lord's Day Observance."

The Collector bent his brows slightly while he smoothed Bayard's mane. Of a sudden the small scene by the Church porch recurred to him. "Stay," he said. "I have not the pleasure of knowing Mr. Wapshott, but may I attempt to describe him to you? He is, perhaps, a gentleman of somewhat stunted growth, but of full habit, and somewhat noticeably red between the ear and the neck-stock?"

"That hits him."

"—with a wife inclining to portliness and six grown daughters, taller than their parents and not precisely in their first bloom. I speak," added the Collector, still eyeing his victim, "as to a man of the world."

"You've seen him anyhow," Mr. Banner nodded. "That's Wapshott."

"I saw him entering his place of worship; and I note that he thinks what you call the Lord's Day well worth keeping at the cost of a falsehood. May I ask, Mr.——" The Collector hesitated.

"Banner."

"Ah, yes—pardon me! May I ask, Mr. Banner, how it comes that you have a nicer sense than your superior of what is due to His Majesty's Service?"

Mr. Banner laughed uneasily. "Well, you mightn't guess it from my looks," he answered with an attempt to ingratiate himself by way of self-deprecation, "but I am pretty good at working out levels. I really am."

"That was not my point, though I shall test you on it presently. You are, it appears, a somewhat less rigid Sabbatarian than Mr. Wapshott?"

Hereupon Mr. Banner became cryptic. "You needn't fear about that," he answered. "I have what they call a dispensation: and until you startled me, I was up here keeping the Lord's Day as well as the best of 'em. Better, perhaps."

"We will get to business," said the Collector. "Follow me, please."

He wheeled his horse and, with Mr. Banner walking at his stirrup, rode slowly out to the end of the headland and as slowly back. The Collector asked a question now and then and to every question the young man responded pat. He was no fool. It soon appeared that he had studied the trajectory of guns, that he had views—and sound ones—on coast defences, and that by some study of the subject he had come, a while ago, to a conclusion the Collector took but a few minutes to endorse; that to build a fort on this headland would be waste of public money.

Professionally, Mr. Banner was tolerable. The Collector, consulting with him, forgot the pertness of his address, the distressing twang of his accent. He had dismounted, and the pair were busy with a tape, calling out and checking measurements, when from the southward there was borne to the Collector's ears the distant crack of a shot-gun.

At the sound of it he glanced up, in time to see Mr. Banner drop the other end of the tape and run. Almost willy-nilly he followed, vaguely wondering if there had happened some accident that called for aid.

Mr. Banner, when the Collector overtook him, had come to a halt overlooking the long beach, and pointed to a figure—a speck almost—for it was distant more than a mile.

"That Josselin girl!" panted Mr. Banner. "I call you to witness!"

The Collector unstrapped his field-glass, which he carried in a bandolier, adjusted it, and through it scanned the beach. Yes, in the distant figure he recognized Ruth Josselin. She carried a gun—or rather, stood with the gun grounded and her hands folded, resting on its muzzle—and appeared to be watching the edge of the breakers, perhaps waiting for them to wash to her feet a dead bird fallen beyond reach.

"See her, do you? I call you to witness!" repeated the voice at his elbow.

"Why, what is the matter?"

"Sabbath breakin'," answered Mr. Banner with a curious leer.

"Ah!"

"But you yourself don't take much account of the Lord's Day, seemingly. Bathin', f'r instance."

"Indeed!" The Collector eyed his companion reflectively. "You honour me with your observation."

Mr. Banner grinned. "Better say the whole of Port Nassau was hon'rin' you. Oh, there'd be no lack of evidence!—but I guess the magistrates were lookin' the other way. They allowed, no doubt, that even a Sabbath-breaker might be havin' friends at Court!"

The Collector could not forbear smiling at the youth's impudence.

"May I ask what punishment I have probably escaped by that advantage?"

"Well," said Mr. Banner, "for lighter cases it's usually the stocks."

Still the Collector smiled. "I am trying to picture it," said he, after a pause. "But you don't tell me they would put a young girl in the stocks, merely for firing a gun on the Lord's Day, as you call it?"

"Wouldn't they!" Mr. Banner chuckled. "That, or the pillory."

"You are a strange folk in Port Nassau." The Collector frowned, upon a sudden suspicion, and his eyes darkened in their scrutiny of Mr. Banner's unpleasant face. "By the way, you told me just now that you were here upon some sort of a dispensation. Forgive me if I do you wrong, but was it by any chance that you might play the spy upon this girl?"

"Shadbolt asked me to keep an eye liftin' for her."

"Who is Shadbolt?"

"The Town Beadle. He's watchin' somewhere along the cliffs." Mr. Banner waved a hand towards

the neck of the headland. "It's a scandal, and by all accounts has been goin' on for weeks."

"So that is why you called me to witness? Well, Mr. Banner, I have a horsewhip lying on the turf yonder, and I warn you to forget your suggestion. . . . Shall we resume our measurements?—and, if you please, in silence. Your presence is distasteful to me."

They turned from the cliff and went back to their work, in which—for they both enjoyed it—they were soon immersed. It may have been, too, that the wind had shifted. At any rate they missed to hear, ten minutes later, a second shot fired on the beach, not more distant but fainter than the first.

CHAPTER IX

THE SCOURGE

NEXT morning, at ten o'clock, the Collector's coach-and-six stood at the inn gate, harnessed up and ready for the return journey. In the roadway beyond one of the grooms waited with a hand on Bayard's bridle.

The Collector, booted and spurred, with riding-whip tucked under his arm, came up the pebbled pathway, drawing on his gauntleted gloves. Dicky trotted beside him. Manasseh followed in attendance. Behind them in the porchway the landlady bobbed unregarded, like a piece of clockwork gradually running down.

"Hey!" The Collector, as he reached the gate, lifted his chin sharply—threw up his head as a finely bred animal scents battle or danger. "What's this? A riot, up the street?"

The grooms could not tell him, for the sound had reached their ears but a second or two before the question; a dull confused murmur out of which, as it increased to a clamour and drew nearer, sharper outcries detached themselves, and the shrill voices of

women. A procession had turned the corner of the head of the avenue—a booing, howling rabble.

The Collector stepped to his horse's rein, flung himself into the saddle, and rode forward at a foot's pace to meet the tumult.

Suddenly his hand tightened on the rein, and Bayard came to a halt; but his master did not perceive this. The hand's movement had been nervous, involuntary. He sat erect—stood, rather, from the stirrup—his nostril dilated, his brain scarcely believing what his eyes saw.

"The swine!" he said slowly, to himself. His teeth were shut and the words inaudible. "The swine!" he repeated.

Men have done, in the name of religion and not so long ago—indeed are perhaps doing now and daily—deeds so vile that mere decency cannot face describing them. It is a question if mere decency (by which I mean the good instinct of civilized man) will not in the end purge faith clean of religion; if, while men dispute and hate and inflict cruelty for religion, they are not all the while outgrowing it. Libraries, for example, are written to prove that unbaptised infants come out of darkness to draw a fleeting breath or two and pass to hell-fire; the dispute occupies men for generations—and lo! one day the world finds it has no use for any such question. Time—no thanks to the theologians—has educated it, and this thing at any rate it would

no longer believe if it could, as it certainly cannot. Faith never yet has burnt man or woman at the stake. Religion has burnt its tens of thousands.

Behind the first two or three ranks of the mob—an exultant mob of grown men, grown women, and (worst of all) little children—plodded a gray horse, drawing a cart. Behind the cart, bound to it, with a thong tight about her fire-scorched wrists— But no; it is not to be written.

They had stripped her to the waist, and then for decency—*their* decency!—had thrown a jacket of coarse sacking over her, lacing it loosely in front with pack-thread. But, because their work required it, this garment had been gathered up into a rope at the neck, whence it dangled in folds over her young breast.

She walked with wide eyes, uttering no sound. She alone of that crowd uttered no sound. A brute with a bandaged jaw walked close behind her. Oliver Vyell saw his forearm swing up—saw the scourge whirl in his fist—met the girl's eyes. . . . She, meeting his, let escape the first and last cry she uttered that day. He could have sworn that her face was scarlet; but no, he was wrong; while he looked he saw his mistake—she was white as death. Then with that one pitiful cry she sank among the close-pressing crowd; but her hands, by the cord's constraint, still lifted themselves as might a drowning swimmer's; and the gray horse—the one other innocent creature in that procession—

plodded forward, dragging her now senseless body at the cart's tail.

"You swine!"

It does a man good sometimes to get in his blow. It did Oliver Vyell good, riding in, to slash twice crosswise on the brute's bandaged face; to feel the whalebone bite and then, as he swung out of saddle, to ram fist and whip-butt together on the ugly mouth, driving in its fore-teeth.

"Stop the horse, some one!" he commanded, as the Beadle reeled back. "She has fainted." He added, "The first man that interferes, I shoot."

The crowd growled. He turned on the nearest mutterer—"Your knife!" The fellow handed it; so promptly, he might have been holding it ready to proffer. The Collector stooped and cut the thongs. This done, he stood up and saw the Beadle advancing again, snarling through the bloody gap in his mouth.

"You had best take that man away," said the Collector quietly, pulling out his small pistol. "If you don't, I am going to kill him." They heard and saw that he meant it. He added in the same tone, "I am going to take all responsibility for this. Will you make way, please?"

His first intention was to lift the body lying unconscious in the roadway, carry it to the coach and drive out of Port Nassau with it, defying the law to inter-

fere. For the moment he "saw red," as we say nowadays, and was quite capable of shooting down, or bidding his servants shoot down, any man who offered to hinder. It is even possible that had he acted straightway upon the impulse, he might, with his momentary mastery of the mob, have won clean away; possible, but by no means likely, for already a couple of constables were pushing forward to support the Beadle, and half a dozen broad-shouldered fellows—haters of "prerogative"—had recovered themselves and were ranging up to support the law. Had he noted this, it would not have daunted him. What he noted, and what gave him pause, was the girl's white back at his feet, upturning its hideous weals. He stooped to lift her, and drew back, shivering delicately at the thought of hurting the torn flesh in his arms—a vain scruple, since she had passed for the moment beyond pain. He picked up the scourge, and stood erect again, crushing it into his pocket.

"Will you make way, please," he ordered, "while I fetch a cover to hide your blasted handiwork?"

He strode through them, and they fell back to give him passage. He walked straight to the coach, pulled the door open, and, in the act of dragging forth a rug, caught sight of Dicky's small, scared face.

"O papa, what has happened?"

"An accident, child. Jump inside; I will explain by-and-by."

"Begging your Honour's pardon"—a heavy-featured fellow, who had followed the Collector to the coach, put out a hand and touched the child's shoulder —"I don't hold in whipping maidens, and if it's a fight I'm with you. But you can't carry her out of it, the way you're meaning. They've seen blood, same as yourself. This child of yours—he stands as much chance to be hurt as any, if you push it. Your Honour'll have to find some other way."

The Collector glanced over his shoulder, and saw that the man spoke truth.

"Dicky," he said easily, but in a voice the child durst not disobey, "there has been an accident. Go you down and amuse yourself on the sands till Manasseh calls you."

He walked back coolly, carrying the rug on his arm.

"Where was she to be taken?" he asked.

"To the stocks!" answered a voice or two. "To the Court-house!" said others.

"It's the same thing," said the heavy-browed man, at the Collector's elbow. "The stocks are just across the square from the Court-house. You'll find the magistrates there; they're the ones to face. They took her case first this morning, and this is the first part of her sentence."

Oliver Vyell walked back to the crowd. It was—a glance assured him—more hostile than before; had recovered from its surprise, and was menacing. But it gave way again before him.

He called on them to give more room. He stooped and, spreading the rug over the girl's body, lifted and laid her in the straw of the cart. A constable would have interfered. The Collector swung round on him.

"You are taking her back to the Court-house? Well, I have business there too. Where is your Court-house?"

The constable pointed.

"Up the road? I am obliged to you. Drive on, if you please."

CHAPTER X

THE BENCH

THE wooden Jail and the wooden Court-house of Port Nassau faced one another across an unpaved grass-grown square planted with maples. To-day—for the fall of the leaf was at hand—these maples flamed with hectic yellows and scarlets; and indeed thousands of leaves, stripped by the recent gales, already strewed the cross-walks and carpeted the ground about the benches disposed in the shade—pleasant seats to which, of an empty afternoon, wives brought their knitting and gossiped while their small children played within sight; haunts, later in the day, of youths who whittled sticks or carved out names with jack-knives—ancient solace of the love-stricken; rarely thronged save when some transgressor was brought to the stocks or the whipping-post.

These instruments of public discipline stood on the northern side of the square, before the iron-studded door of the Jail. The same hand, maybe, that had blackened over the Jail's weather-boarded front with a coat of tar, had with equal propriety whitewashed

the façade of the Court-house; an immaculate building, set in the cool shade, its straight-lined front broken only by a recessed balcony whence, as occasion arose, Mr. George Bellingham, Chief Magistrate, delivered the text of a proclamation, royal or provincial, or declared the poll when the people of Port Nassau chose their Selectmen.

This morning Mr. Bellingham held session within, in the long, airy court-room, and dispensed justice with the help of three fellow-magistrates—Mr. Trask, Mr. Somershall, and our friend Mr. Wapshott. They sat at a long baize-covered table, with the Justices' Clerk to advise them. On the wall behind and above their heads hung a framed panel emblazoned with the royal escutcheon, the lion and unicorn for supporters, an inscription in old French to the effect that there is shame in evil-thinking, and another

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distributed among the four corners of the panel, with the date 1660 below. This had been erected (actually in 1664, but the artist had received instructions to antedate it) when the good people of Massachusetts after some demur rejoiced in the Restoration and accepted King Charles II as defender of their Faith.

The four magistrates had dealt (as we know) with

a case of Sabbath-breaking; had inflicted various terms of imprisonment on two drunkards and a beggar-woman; had discharged for lack of evidence (but with admonition) a youth accused of profane swearing; and were now working through a list of commoner and more venial offences, such as cheating by the use of false weights.

These four grave gentlemen looked up in slightly shocked deprecation; for the Collector entered without taking account of the constable at the door, save to thrust him aside. The Clerk called "Silence in the Court!" mechanically, and a deputy-beadle at his elbow as mechanically repeated it.

"Your Worships"—the Collector, hat in hand, advanced to the table and bowed—"will forgive an interruption which only its urgency can excuse."

"Ah! Captain Vyell, I believe?" Mr. Bellingham arose from his high-backed throne of carved oak, bowed, and extended a hand across the table. "I had heard that you were honouring Port Nassau with a visit; but understanding from our friend Mr. Wapshott that the visit was—er—not official—that, in fact, it was connected with government business not—er—to be divulged, I forbore to do myself the pleasure—" Mr. Bellingham had a courtly manner and a courtly presence. He was a tallish man, somewhat thin in the face and forehead, of classical features and a sanguine complexion. He came of a family highly dis-

tinguished in the history of Massachusetts; but he was in fact a weak man, though he concealed this by some inherited aptitude for public business and a well-trained committee manner.

"I thank you." The Collector shook the proffered hand and bowed again. "You will pardon my abruptness? A girl has fainted outside here, in the street——"

Mr. Bellingham's well-shaped brows arched themselves a trifle higher.

"Indeed?" he murmured, at a loss.

"A young girl who—as I understand—was suffering public punishment under sentence of yours."

"Yes?" Mr. Bellingham's smile grew vaguer, and his two hands touched finger-tips in front of his magisterial stomach—an adequate stomach but well on the right side of grossness. He glanced at his fellow-magistrates right and left. "It—er—sometimes happens," he suggested.

"I dare say." Captain Vyell took him up. "But she has fainted under the punishment. She has passed the limit of her powers, poor child; and they tell me that what she has endured is to be followed, and at once, by five hours in the stocks. Gentlemen, I repeat I am quite well aware that this is most irregular—you may call it indecent; but I saw the poor creature fall, and, as it happens, I know something that might have softened you before you passed sentence."

Here the Clerk interposed, stiffening the Chief Magistrate, who wore a smile of embarrassed politeness.

"As His Honour—as Captain Vyell—suggests, your Worships, this is quite irregular."

"To be sure—to be sure—of course," hemm'd Mr. Bellingham. "We can only overlook that, when appealed to by a person of your distinction," here he inclined himself gently. "Still, you will understand, a sentence is a sentence. As for a temporary faintness, that is by no means outside our experience. Our Beadle—Shadbolt—invariably manages to revive them sufficiently to endure—er—the rest."

I'll be shot if he will this time, thought the Collector grimly, with a glance down at a smear across the knuckle of his right-hand glove. The sight of it cheered him and steadied his temper. "Possibly," said he aloud. "But your Worships may not be aware—and as merciful men may be glad to hear—that this poor creature's offence against the Sabbath was committed under stress. Her mother and grandfather have starved this week through, as I happen to know."

"That may, or may not be," put in Mr. Trask—a dry-complexioned, stubborn, malignant-looking man, seated next on the Chairman's right. "But the girl—if you mean Ruth Josselin—has not been scourged for Sabbath-breaking. For that she will sit in the stocks—our invariable sentence for first offenders in

this respect." From under his down-drawn brows Mr. Trask eyed the Collector malevolently. "Ruth Josselin," he continued, "has suffered the scourge for having resisted Beadle Shadbolt in the discharge of his duty, and for unlawful wounding."

"Excuse me," put in Mr. Somershall, speaking across from the Chairman's left. Mr. Somershall was afflicted with deafness, but liked to assert himself whenever a word by chance reached him and gave him a clue. He leaned sideways, arching a palm around his one useful ear. "Excuse me; we brought it in 'attempted wounding,' I believe? I have it noted so, here on the margin of my charge-sheet." He glanced at the Clerk, who nodded for confirmation.

"It didn't matter," Mr. Trask snapped brutally. "She got it, just the same."

"Oh, quite so!" Mr. Somershall took his hand from his ear and nodded, satisfied with having made his point.

"Wounding?" echoed the Collector, addressing the Chairman. "To be frank with you, Sir, I had not heard of this—though it scarcely affects my plea."

Mr. Bellingham smiled indulgently. "Say no more, Captain Vyell—pray say no more! This is not the first time an inclination to deem us severe has been corrected by a fuller acquaintance with the facts. . . . Yes, yes—chivalrous feeling—I quite understand; but you see—" He concluded his sentence with a gentle

wave of the hand. "You will be glad to hear, since you take an interest in the girl, that Providence overruled her aim and Shadbolt escaped with a mere graze of the jaw—so slight, indeed, that, taking a merciful view, we decided not to consider it an actual wound, and convicted her only of the attempt. By the way, Mr. Leemy, where is the weapon?"

The Clerk produced it from his bag and laid it on the table. Captain Vyell drew a sharp breath.

"It is my pistol."

"Eh?"

"I have the fellow to it, here." He pulled out the other and handed it by the muzzle.

"To be sure—to be sure; the pattern is identical," murmured Mr. Bellingham examining it and for the moment completely puzzled. "You—er—suggest that she stole it?"

"Certainly not. I lent it to her."

There followed a slow pause. It was broken by the grating voice of Mr. Trask:—

"You remember, Mr. Chairman, that the prisoner stubbornly refused to tell how the pistol came in her possession? Does Captain Vyell give us to understand that his interest in this young woman is of older date than this morning's encounter?"

"My interest in her—such as it is—dates, sir, from the evening before last, when she was dismissed from the Bowling Green Inn. The hour was late; her home,

as you know, lies at some distance—though doubtless within the ambit of your authority. I lent her this small weapon to protect herself should she be molested."

"And she used it next day, upon the Beadle! Dismissed, you say! Why was she dismissed?"

"I regret that I was not more curious at the time," answered the Collector with the politest touch of weariness. "I believe it was for saving the house from fire—something of that sort. As told to me, it sounded rather heroical. But, sir—" he turned again to the Chairman— "I suggest that all this does not affect my plea. Whatever her offence, she has suffered cruelly. She is physically unfit to bear this second punishment; and when I tell you on my word as a gentleman—or on oath, if you will—that on Saturday I found her grandparent starving and that her second offence was committed presumably to supply the household wants, surely I shall not entreat your mercy in vain?"

The Chief Magistrate hesitated, and a frown showed his annoyance. "To tell you the truth, Captain Vyell, you put me in a quandary. I do not like to refuse you—" Here he glanced right and left.

"But it can't be done," snapped Mr. Trask. Mr. Wapshott, sitting just beyond, shook his head gently and—as he hoped—unperceived by the Collector.

"You see, sir," explained Mr. Bellingham with a

sigh, "we sit here to administer justice without fear or favour. You see also to what scandal it might give rise if a culprit—merely on the intercession of a gentleman like yourself—influential—er—and, in short——"

"—In short, sir," the Collector broke in, "you have in the name of justice committed one damnable atrocity upon this child, and plead your cowardice as an excuse for committing another. Influential, am I? And you prate to me of not being affected by that? Very well, I'll take you at your word. This girl resisted your ruffian in the discharge of his duty? So did I just now, and with such effect that he will resume it neither to-day nor to-morrow. She inflicted, it appears, a slight graze on his chin. I inflicted two cuts on his face and knocked in three of his teeth. You can take cognisance of *my* wounding, I promise you. Now, sir, will you whip *me* through your town?"

"This is mere violence, sir." Mr. Bellingham's face was flushed, but he answered with dignity. "The law is as little to be exasperated as defied."

"I will try you in another way, then," said the Collector, recovering grip of his temper and dropping his voice to a tone of politest insolence. "It is understood that you have not the courage to do this because, seated here and administering what you call justice, you have, each one of you, an eye upon England and preferment, and you know well enough that to touch me would play the devil among the tailors with your

little ambitions. I except"—with a bow towards Mr. Trask—"this gentleman, who seems to have earned his influence on your counsels by rugged force of character, and—" for here Mr. Trask, who enjoyed a dig at his colleagues, cast his eyes down and compressed a grin—"is, I should judge, capable of striking a woman for the mere fun of it." Here Mr. Bellingham and Mr. Wapshott looked demure in turn; for that Mr. Trask led his wife a dog's life was notorious.

"In truth, gentlemen," the Collector continued easily, "I am at some loss in addressing you, seeing that through some defect of courtesy you have omitted to wait on me, albeit informed (I believe) that I came as His Majesty's Commissioner; and that therefore I have not even the pleasure of knowing your names. I may except that of Mr. Wapshott, whom I am glad to see convalescent this morning." Here he inclined to Mr. Wapshott, whose gills under the surprised gaze of his colleagues took a perceptibly redder tinge. "Mr. Wapshott, gentlemen," explained the Collector, smiling, "had a slight attack of vertigo yesterday, on the steps of his Place of Worship. Well, sirs, as I was saying, I will try you in another way. You have not the courage to bring me to trial for assaulting your beadle. You have not even the courage, here and now, to throw me out. I believe, however, that upon a confessed breach of the law—supported by evidence, if necessary—I can force you to try me. The Clerk will

correct me if I am wrong. . . . Apparently he assents. Then I desire to confess to you that yesterday, at such-and-such an hour, I broke your laws or bye-laws of Lord's Day Observance, by bathing in the sea for my pleasure. I demand trial on this charge, and, if you convict me—here you can hardly help yourselves, since to my knowledge some of you witnessed the offence—I demand my due punishment of the stocks."

"Really—really, Captain Vyell!" hemm'd the Chief Magistrate. "Passing over your derogatory language, I am at a loss to understand——"

"Are you? Yet it is very simple. Since you reject my plea for this poor creature, I desire to share her punishment."

"Let him," snapped the mouth of Mr. Trask again, opening and shutting like a trap.

"*You* at any rate, sir, have sense," the Collector felicitated him and turned to the Chief Magistrate. "And you, sir, if you will oblige me, may rest assured that I shall bear the magistracy of Port Nassau no grudge whatever."

CHAPTER XI

THE STOCKS

In the end they came to a compromise. That Dame Justice should be hustled in this fashion—taken by the shoulders, so to speak, forced to catch up her robe and skip—offended the Chief Magistrate's sense of propriety. It was unseemly in the last degree, he protested. Nevertheless it appeared certain that Captain Vyell had a right to be tried and punished; and the Clerk's threat to set down the hearing for an adjourned sessions was promptly countered by the culprit's producing His Majesty's Commission, which enjoined upon all and sundry "*to observe the welfare of my faithful subject, Oliver John Dinham de Courcy Vyell, now travelling on the business of this my Realm, and to further that business with all zeal and expedition as required by him*"—a command which might be all the more strictly construed for being loosely worded. To be sure the Court might by dilatory process linger out the hearing of the Weights and Measures cases—one of which was being scandalously interrupted at this

moment—or it might adjourn for dinner and reassemble in the afternoon, by which time the sands of Ruth Josselin's five hours' ignominy would be running out. But here Mr. Somershall had to be reckoned with. Mr. Somershall not only made it a practice to sit long at dinner and sleep after it; he invariably lost his temper if the dinner-hour were delayed; and, being deaf as well as honest, he was capable of blurting out his mind in a fashion to confound either of these disingenuous courses. As for Mr. Wapshott, the wording of the Commission had frightened him, and he wished himself at home.

It was Mr. Trask who found the way out. Mr. Trask, his malevolent eye fixed on the Collector, opined that after all an hour or two in the stocks would be a salutary lesson for hot blood and pampered flesh. He suggested that, without insisting on a trial, the Captain might be obliged, and his legs given that lesson. He cited precedents. More than once a friend or relative had, by mercy of the Court, been allowed to sit beside a culprit under punishment. If, a like leave being granted him, Captain Vyell preferred to have his ankles confined—why, truly, Mr. Trask saw no reason for denying him the experience. But the Captain, it was understood, must give his word of honour, first, to accept this as a free concession from the Bench, and, secondly, not to repent or demand release before the expiry of the five hours.

"With all my heart," promised Captain Vyell; and the Chief Magistrate reluctantly gave way.

Ruth Josselin sat in the stocks. She had come so far out of her swoon that her pulse beat, her breath came and went, she felt the sun warm on her face, and was aware of some pain where the edge of the wood pressed into her flesh, a little above the ankle-bones —of discomfort, rather, in comparison with the anguish throbbing and biting across her shoulder-blades. Some one—it may have been in unthinking mercy—had drawn down the sackcloth over her stripes, and the coarse stuff, irritating the raw, was as a shirt of fire.

She had come back to a sense of this torture, but not yet to complete consciousness. She sat with eyes half closed, filmed with suffering. As they had closed in the moment of swooning, so and with the same look of horror they awoke as the lids parted. But they saw nothing; neither the sunlight dappling the maple shadows nor the curious faces of the crowd. She felt the sunlight; the crowd's presence she felt not at all.

But misery she felt; a blank of misery through which her reviving soul—like the shoot of a plant trodden into mire—pushed feebly towards the sunlight that coaxed her eyes to open. Something it sought there . . . a face . . . yes, a face.

—Yes, of course, a face; lifted high above other

faces that were hateful, hostile, mocking her misery—God knew why; a strong face, not very pitiful—but so strong!—and yet it must be pitiful too, for it condescended to help. It was moving down, bending, to help. . . .

What had become of it? Ah, now (shame at length reawakening) she remembered! She was hiding from him. He was strong, he was kind, but above all he must not see her shame. Let the earth cover her and hide it! . . . and either the merciful earth had opened or a merciful darkness had descended. She remembered sinking into it—sinking—her hands held aloft, as by ropes. Then the ropes had parted. She had fallen, plumb.

She was re-emerging now; and either shame lay far below, a cast-off weed in the depths, or shame had driven out shame as fire drives out fire. Her back was burning; her tongue was parched; her eyes were seared as they half opened upon the crowd. The grinning faces—the mouths pulled awry, mocking a sorrow they did not understand—these were meaningless to her. She did not, in any real sense, behold them. Her misery was a sea about her, and in the trough of it she looked up, seeking one face.

And why not? It had shone far above her as a god's; but she had been sucked down as deep again, and there is an extreme of degradation may meet even a god's attitude on equal terms. Stark mortal, stark

god—its limit of suffering past, humanity joins the celestial, clasping its knees.

Of a sudden, turning her eyes a little to the left, she saw him.

He had come at a strolling pace across the square, with Manasseh and the deputy-beadle walking wide beside him, and the court-house rabble at his heels—but keeping, in spite of themselves, a respectful distance. At the stocks he faced about, and they halted on the instant, as though he had spoken a word of command. He smiled, seated himself leisurably at the end of the bench on Ruth Josselin's left, and extended a leg for Manasseh to draw off its riding-boot. At the back of the crowd a few voices chattered, but within the semi-circle a hush had fallen.

It was then that she turned her eyes and saw him.

How came he here? What was he doing? . . . She could not comprehend at all. Only she felt her heart leap within her and stand still, as like a warm flood the consciousness of his presence stole through her, poured over her, soothing away for the moment all physical anguish. She sat very still, her hands in her lap; afraid to move, afraid even to look again. This consciousness—it should have been shame, but it held no shame at all. It was hope. It came near, very near, to bliss.

She was aware in a dull way of some one unlocking and lifting the upper beam of the stocks. Were they

releasing her? Surely her sentence had been for five hours?—surely her faintness could not have lasted so long! This could not be the end? She did not wish to be released. She would not know what to do, where to go, when they set her free. She must walk home through the town, and that would be worst of all.

Or perhaps *he* was commanding them to release her? . . . No; the beam creaked and dropped into place again. A moment ago his voice had been speaking; speaking very cheerfully, not to her. Now it was silent. After some minutes she gathered courage to turn her eyes again.

Captain Vyell sat with his legs in durance. They were very shapely legs, cased in stockings of flesh-coloured silk with crimson knee-ties. He sat in perfect patience, and rolled a tobacco-leaf between his fingers. At his shoulder stood Manasseh like a statue, with face immobile as marble—black marble—and a tinder-box ready in his hand.

"Why? . . ."

He could not be sure if it were a word, or merely a sigh, deep in her breast, so faintly it reached him. She had murmured it as if to herself, yet it seemed to hang on a question. His ear was alert.

"Hush!" he said, speaking low and without glancing towards her, for the eyes of the crowd were on them. "The faintness is over?"

"Yes."

"Do not talk at all. By-and-by we will talk. Now I am going to ask you a selfish question, and you are just to bend your head for 'yes' or 'no.' Will the smell of tobacco distress you, or bring the faintness back? These autumn flies sting abominably here, under the trees."

She moved her head slowly. "I do not feel them," she said after a while.

He glanced at her compassionately before nodding to Manasseh for a light. "No, poor wretch, I'll be sworn you do not," he muttered between the puffs. "Thank you, Manasseh; and now will you step down to the inn, order the horses back to stable, and bring George and Harry back with you? I may require them to break a head or two here, if there should be trouble. Tell Alexander"—this was the coachman—"to have an eye on Master Dicky, and see that he gets his dinner. The child is on no account to come here, or be told about this. His papa is detained on business—you understand? Yes, and by the way, you may extract a book from the valise—the Calderon, for choice, or if it come handier, that second volume of Corneille. Don't waste time, though, in searching for this or that. In the stocks I've no doubt a book is a book: the instrument has a reputation for levelling."

Manasseh departed on his errand, and for a while the Collector paid no heed to his companion. He and she were now unprotected, at the mercy of the

mob if it intended mischief; and the next few minutes would be critical.

He sat immersed apparently in his own thoughts, and by the look on his face these were serious thoughts. He seemed to see and yet not to see the ring of faces; to be aware of them, yet not concerned with them, no whit afraid and quite as little defiant. True, he was smoking, but without a trace of affected insouciance or bravado; gravely rather, resting an elbow on his groin and leaning forward with a preoccupied frown. Two minutes passed in this silence, and he felt the danger ebbing. Mob insolence ever wants a lead, and—perhaps because with the return of fine weather the fishing-crews had put to sea early—this Port Nassau crowd lacked a fugleman.

"Are you here—because—of me?"

"Hush, again," he answered quietly, not turning his head. "I like you to talk if you feel strong enough; but for the moment it will be better if they do not perceive. . . . Yes, and no," he answered her question after a pause. "I am here to see that you get through this. You are in pain?"

"Yes; but it is easier."

"You are afraid of these people?"

"Afraid?" She took some time considering this. "No," she said at length. "I am not afraid of them. I do not see them. You are here."

He took the tobacco-leaf from his lips, blew a thin cloud of smoke with grave deliberateness, and in doing so contrived to glance at her face.

"You have blood in you. That face, too, my beauty," he muttered, "never came to you but by gift of blood." Aloud he said, "That's brave. But take care when your senses clear and the strain comes back on you. Speak to me when you feel it coming; I don't want it to tauten you up with a jerk. You understand?"

"Yes. . . ."

"I wonder now—" he began musingly, and broke off. The danger he had been keeping account with was over; Manasseh had returned with the two grooms, and they—perfectly trained servants on the English model—took their posts without exhibiting surprise by so much as a twitch of the face. George in particular was a tight fellow with his fists, as the crowd, should it offer annoyance, would assuredly learn. The Collector took the volume which Manasseh brought him, and opened it, but did not begin to read. "You despise these people?" he asked.

He was puzzled with himself. He was here to protect her; and this, from him to her, implied a noble condescension. His fine manners, to be sure, forbade his showing it; on no account would he have shown it. But the puzzle was, he could not feel it.

She met his eyes. "No . . . why should I despise them?"

"They are *canaille.*"

"What does that mean? . . . They have been cruel to me. Afterwards, I expect, they will be crueller still. But just now it does not matter, because you are here."

"Does that make so much difference?" he asked thoughtlessly.

She caught her breath upon a sob. "Ah, do not—" The voice died, strangled, in her throat. "Do not—" Again she could get no further, but sat shivering, her fingers interlocked and writhing.

"Brute!" muttered the Collector to himself. He did not ask her pardon, but opened his Calderon, signed to Manasseh to roll a fresh tobacco-leaf, and fell to reading his favorite *Alcalde de Zalamea.*

The sun crept slowly to the right over the tops of the maples. It no longer scorched the face, but slanted in rays through the upper boughs, dappling the open walks with splashes of light which, as they receded in the distance, took by a trick of the eyesight a pattern regular as diaper. By this time the Collector, when he glanced up from his book, had an ample view of the square, for the crowd had thinned. The punishment of the stocks was no such rare spectacle in Port Nassau; and five hours is a tedious while even for the onlooker—a very long while indeed to stand weighing the fun of throwing a handful of filth against the cost of a thrashing. The

men-folk, reasoning thus, had melted away to their longshore avocations. The women, always more patient—as to their nature the show was more piquant than to the men's—had withdrawn with their knitting to benches well within eyeshot. The children, playing around, grew more and more immersed in their games; which, nevertheless, one or another would interrupt from time to time to point and ask a question. Above the court-house the town clock chimed its quarters across the afternoon heat.

The Collector, glancing up in the act of turning a page, spied Mr. Trask hobbling down an alley towards the jail. Mr. Trask, a martyr to gout, helped his progress with an oaken staff. He leaned on this as he halted before the stocks.

"Tired?" he asked.

"Damnably!" answered the Collector with great cheerfulness. "It takes one in the back, you see. If ever the Town Fathers think of moving this machine, you might put in a word for shifting it a foot or two back, against the prison wall."

Mr. Trask grinned.

"I suppose now," he said after a pause, "you think you are doing a fine thing, and doing it handsomely?"

"I had some notion of the sort, but this confinement of the feet is wonderfully cooling to the brain. No—if you dispute it. Most human actions are mixed."

Mr. Trask eyed him, chin between two fingers and thumb. When he spoke again it was with lowered voice. "Is it altogether kind to the girl?" he asked.

"Eh?" The Collector in turn eyed Mr. Trask.

"O—Or even quite fair to her?"

"Oh, come!" said the Collector. "Tongues? I hadn't thought of that."

"I daresay not." Mr. Trask glanced up at the windows of a two-storeyed house on the left, scarcely a stone's throw away, a respectable mansion with a verandah and neat gateway of wrought iron. "But at the end of this what becomes of her?"

The Collector shrugged his shoulders. "I have thought of *that*, at all events. My coach will be here to take her home. It lies on our road. As for me, I shall have to mount at once and ride though the night—a second test for the backbone."

"Ride and be hanged to you!" broke out Mr. Trask with a snarl of scorn. "But for the rest, if your foppery leave you any room to consider the girl, you couldn't put a worse finish on your injury. Drive her off in your coach indeed!—and what then becomes of her reputation?"

"—Of what you have left to her, you mean? Damn it—*you* to talk like this!"

"Do not be profane, Captain Vyell. . . . We see things differently, and this punishment was meted to her—if cruelly, as you would say—still in honest con-

cern for her soul's good. But if you, a loose-living man—" Mr. Trask paused.

"Go on."

"I thank you. For the moment I forgot that you are not at liberty. But I used not that plainness of speech to insult you; rather because it is part of the argument. If you, then, drive away with this child in public, through this town, you do her an injury for which mere carelessness is your best excuse; and the world will assign it a worse."

"The world!"

"I mean the world this young woman will have to live in. But we talk at cross-purposes. When I asked, 'What becomes of her at the end of this?' I was thinking of the harm you have already done. As a fact, I have ordered my cart to be ready to take her home."

Captain Vyell considered for a few seconds. "Sir," he said, "since plain speech is allowed between us, I consider you a narrow bigot; but, I hasten to add, you are the best man I have met in Port Nassau. By the way—that house on our left—does it by chance belong to Mr. Wapshott?"

"It does."

"I thought so. For a couple of hours past, in the intervals of my reading, I have discovered a family of tall young women peeking at us from behind the windows and a barrier of furniture; and once, it seemed

to me, I detected the wattles of your worthy fellow-magistrate. He ought not to strain that neck; you should warn him of the danger."

"It should have warned you, sir, of what mischief you are doing."

"I seem to remember," the Collector mused, "reading the words '*Honi soit qui mal y pense*' to-day written on the wall behind you. Why, damn me, sir, for aught you or any of them can tell, I intend to marry this girl! Why not? Go and tell them. Could there, you'll say, be a fairer betrothal? The reputable plight their troth with a single ring around the woman's finger; but here are four rings around the four ankles, and the bar locked. With your leave, which is the more symbolical?"

"You are a reprobate man, Captain Vyell," was the answer, "and I have no relish for your talk. I will only say this; when her punishment is done, my cart shall be ready for her; and you, if you would vindicate an action which—for I'll give you that credit—sprang from a generous impulse, will go your ways and let this child live down her humiliation."

Mr. Trask turned and went his way up the alley, across which the sun made level rays of flame. The Collector sat in thought.

He turned his head, surprised by the sound of a sob. A small child had drawn near—a toddler of four, trail-

ing her wooden doll with its head in the dust—and stood a few paces in front of Ruth Josselin, round-eyed, finger at mouth.

"Steady, my girl. Steady!"

At the murmured warning she braced her body stiffly, and no second sob came. But the tears ran—the first in all her long agony—and small shivers, as light winds play on aspen, chased one another down her throat. Almost you could guess them passing down her flesh beneath the sackcloth, rippling over its torn and purple ridges.

He did not check her weeping. The child—small, innocent cause of it—stood round-eyed, wondering. "She has been naughty. What has she done, to be so naughty?"

Over the maples the town clock deliberately told the hour.

They were free. The Collector tossed away the half-smoked tobacco leaf—his twelfth—drew a long breath, and emitted it with a gay laugh of relief. At the same moment he saw Mr. Trask's bullock-cart approaching down the dappled avenue.

CHAPTER XII

THE HUT BY THE BEACH

"AND you'll never hold up your head again! No more will any of us. The disgrace of it! the disgrace of it!"

Ruth stood in the middle of the wretched room, with her hands hanging slack and her eyes bent wearily upon her mother, who had collapsed upon a block of sawn timber and sat there, with sack apron cast over her head, rocking her body.

"Hush, ye fool!" said old Josselin, and spat out of window. Mechanically, by habit, his dim eyes swept along the beach by the breakers' edge. "What's the use, any way?" he added.

"We, that always carried ourselves so high, for all our being poor! It's God's mercy that took your father before he could see this day. 'Twould have broken his sperrit. Your father a Josselin, and me a Pocock, with lands of my own—if right was law in this world; and now to be stripped naked and marched through the streets!"

Ruth's eyes met the Collector's. He stood just within the doorway, and was regarding her curiously.

She did not plead or protest; only, as their eyes met, a flush rose to her cheek, and he guessed rightly that the touch of shame was for her mother not for herself. The flush deepened as old Josselin turned and said apologetically,—

"You mustn't mind M'ria. She's weak-minded. Always was; but sence her husband was drowned—he was my second son—she've lost whatever wits she had. The gal here was born about that time." Here the old man launched into some obstetrical guesswork, using the plainest words. It embarrassed the Collector; the girl did not so much as wince.

"Poor might be stood," moaned the woman; "but poor and shamed!" Then of a sudden, as though recollecting herself, she arose with an air of mincing gentility. "Ruth," she said, "it's little we can offer the gentleman, but you *might* get out the bread and cheese, after his being so kind to you."

"Sit down, you dormed fool," commanded her father-in-law. "Here, fetch your seat over to the lookout, an' tell me if that's a log I see floatin'. She's wonderful good at that," he explained, without lowering his voice, "and it'll keep her quiet. It's true, though, what she said about the property. Thousands of acres, if she had her rights—up this side of the Kennebee." He jerked a thumb northwards. "The Pococks bought it off one of the Gorges, gettin' on for a hundred years sence; and by rights, as I say, a seventh

share oughter be hers. But lawyers! The law's like a ship's pump: pour enough in for a start, and it'll reward ye with floods. But where's the money to start it?"

The Collector scarcely heard him. His eyes were on Ruth's face. He had walked briskly down from the Town Square to the Bowling Green Inn, refreshed himself, let saddle his horse, and set forth, leaving orders for his coach to follow. At the summit of the hill above Port Nassau he had overtaken the cart with the poor girl lying in it, had checked his pace to ride alongside, and so, disregarding Mr. Trask's counsel, had brought her home. Nay, dismissing the men with a guinea apiece, he had desired them to return to Mr. Trask and report his conduct.

"Listen to me," he said suddenly, checking Old Josselin in full flow. "You say, both of you, that Ruth here will live under disgrace; and I daresay you are right. Why not send her away? Get her out of this."

The woman by the window turned her head with a vague simper. The old man, building a small heap of chips on the hearthstone, distended his cheeks and let out his breath slowly, as though coaxing a fire already kindled.

"All very well—but where? And where's the money to come from? Besides, we can't spare the child; she vittles us. Dorm it, Ruth," he exclaimed, on a

sudden recollection, "you don't say you ha'n't brought back the gun!"

"No, grandfather."

"Why? The magistrates would have given it back. It's ruination for us without the gun, and that you might have remembered. Better step over and ask 'em for it to-morrow."

"Must I?" asked the girl slowly.

"'Course you'll have to," said her grandparent. '*I* can't walk the distance, and that you know.—My eyesight's poor," he explained to the Collector, "and I can't walk, because—" here he stated an organic complaint very frankly. "As for M'ria, she's an eye like a fish-hawk; but you never saw such a born fool with firearms. Well, must heat some water, I reckon, to bathe the poor maid's back."

"First give her food," said the Collector. He stepped forward and himself cut a large manchet from the loaf the old man produced. She took it from him and ate ravenously, like a young wild animal, tearing at the crust with her teeth. "They haven't broken your body's health, then," he thought to himself. Aloud he said, "You don't quite take my meaning, Mr. Josselin, and I'll put it to you in a straight offer. Let her come with me to Boston. She shall be put to school there, say for three years; she shall live among folk who will treat her kindly, and teach her at any rate to build up her spirit again and be happy, as she

will never be within these miles of Port Nassau; and in return——"

"Ah!" said the old man significantly.

"In return you shall accept from me a decent pension—enough, at any rate, to fend off want. We will not quarrel over the amount, up or down. Or, if you prefer, I will get the lawyers to look into this claim of your daughter-in-law's, and maybe make you an offer for it."

"Ah!" repeated Old Josselin, and nodded. "Taken your eye, has she? Oh, I'm not blamin' your lordship! Flesh will after flesh, and—you can believe it or not—I was all for the women in my time." He chuckled, and had added some gross particulars before the young man could check him. Yet the old fellow was so naif and direct that his speech left no evil taste. He talked as one might of farm stock. "But we're decent folk, we Josselins. It's hard to starve and be decent too, and times enough I've been sorry for it; but decent we are."

The Collector frowned. "Mr. Josselin," he answered, "I am offering you to take your granddaughter away and have her educated. What that will make of her I neither can tell you nor have I means of guessing; but this I will undertake, and give you my word of honour for it: in three years' time she shall come back to you in all honesty, unharmed by me or by any one. By that time she will be a woman grown, able to

decide as a woman; but she shall come to you, nevertheless."

The old man fumbled with a finger, scraping together the flakes of touchwood in a tinder-box.

"D'ye hear, M'ria? His Honour wants our Ruth to go along with him."

The Collector glanced at the girl's face. Years after, and a hundred times, he recalled the look with which she turned towards her mother. At the same instant her mother faced about with a vacuous silly smile.

"Eh?"

"To larn to be a lady," Old Josselin explained, raising his voice as though she were deaf.

"That would a fine thing," she answered mincingly, and returned her gaze to the window and the line of shore.

CHAPTER XIII

RUTH SETS OUT

MANASSEH had wrapped Master Dicky up warm in a couple of rugs, and spread a third about his feet. In the ample seat of the coach the child reclined as easily as in a bed. He began to doze while the vehicle yet jolted over the road crossing the headland; and when it gained the track, and the wheels rolled smoothly on the hard sand, the motion slid him deep into slumber.

He came out of it with a start and a catch of the breath, and for a full half-minute lay with all his senses numbed, not so much scared as bewildered. In his dreams he had been at home in Boston, and he searched his little brain, wondering why he was awake, and if he should call for Miss Quiney (who slept always within hail, in a small bedroom); and why, when the night-nursery window lay to the left of his bed, strange lights should be flashing on his right, where the picture of King William landing at Torbay hung over his wash-stand.

The lights moved to and fro, then they were quenched, and all was dark about him. But he heard Manasseh's

voice, some way off, in the darkness, and the sound of it brought him to his bearings. He was in the coach, he remembered; and realizing this, he was instantly glad—for he was a plucky child—that he had not called out to summon Miss Quiney.

Had there been an accident? At any rate he was not hurt. His father had ridden on ahead, and would reach home many hours in advance. The boy had learnt this from Manasseh. He reasoned that, if an accident had happened, his father would not hear of it—would be riding forward, further and further into the night. He wondered how Manasseh and the grooms would manage without his father, who always gave the orders, and was never at a loss.

He sat up, peering out into the night. He was still peering thus, building hasty, wild guesses, when again a light showed, waving as it drew nearer. It came close; it was one of the coach-lamps, and blazed full into his eyes through the window. The door opened, letting in the roar of the beach and smiting his small nostrils with sea-brine, that with one breath purged away the stuffy scent of leather.

Manasseh was handing some one into the coach.

"De child—Mas' Richard—if you'll tak' care, miss. He's fas' asleep, prob'ly."

"But I'm *not*," said Dicky, sitting bolt upright and gathering his rugs about him. "Who is it?"

Manasseh perhaps did not hear. He made no reply,

at any rate, but turned the lamp full on Ruth Josselin as she sank back against the cushions on Dicky's right.

"You will find plenty rugs, miss."

He shut the door. Dicky, holding his breath, heard him replace the lamp in its socket, and felt the soft tilt of his great weight as he climbed to the perch behind.

"R—right away!"

There was a tug, and the great coach rolled forward. In the darkness Dicky caught the sound of a smothered sob.

"Who are you?" he asked. There was no response, and after a moment he added, "I know. You are the girl who put out the fire. I like you."

He was very sleepy. He wondered why she did not answer; but, his childish instinct assuring him that she was a friend, in his somnolence he felt nothing other than trust in her. He nestled close in his rugs and reached out an arm.

It rubbed across the weals on Ruth's back, and was torture. She clenched her teeth, while tears—tears of physical anguish, irrepressible—overbrimmed her lashes and fell uncounted in the darkness.

"You are crying. Why? I like you." The child's voice trailed off into dream.

"Closer!" whispered Ruth, and would have forced the embrace upon her pain; but it relaxed. Dicky's

head fell sideways, and rested, angled between the cushions and her shoulder.

She sat wide-eyed, staring into folds of darkness, while the coach rolled forward smoothly towards the dawn.

BOOK II

THE BRIDE

CHAPTER I

AFTER TWO YEARS

"COME down and play!"

Ruth, looking down from the open lattice, smiled and shook her head. "I must not; I'm doing my lessons."

"Must not!" mimicked Master Dick. "You're getting stupider and stupider, living up here. If you don't look out, one of these days you'll turn into an old maid—just like Miss Quiney."

"Hs-s-sh! She's downstairs somewhere."

"I don't care if she hears." Dicky ran his eyes defiantly along the line of ground-floor windows, under the verandah, then upturned his face again. "After coming all this way on purpose to play with you," he protested.

"You have made yourself dreadfully hot."

"I *am* hot," the boy confessed. "I gave Piggy the slip at the foot of the hill, and I've run every step of the way."

"Is *he* here?" Ruth glanced nervously towards a clump of elms around which the path from the entrance-gate curved into view. "But you oughtn't to call Mr. Silk 'Piggy,' you know. It's—it's ungentlemanly."

"Why, I took the name from you! You said yourself, one day, that he was a pig; and so he is. He has piggy eyes, and he eats too much, and there's something about the back of his neck you must have noticed."

"It's cruel of you, Dicky, to remember and cast up what I said when I knew no better. You know how hard I am learning: in the beginning you helped me to learn."

"Did I?" mused Dicky. "Then I wish I hadn't, if you're going to grow up and treat me like this. Oh, very well," he added stoutly after a pause, "then I'm learning too, learning to be a sailor; and it'll be first-rate practice to climb aloft to you, over the verandah. You don't mind my spitting on my hands? It's a way they have in the Navy."

"Dicky, don't be foolish! Think of Miss Quiney's roses." Finding him inexorable, Ruth began to parley. "I don't want to see Mr. Silk. But if I come down to you, it will not be to play. We'll creep off to the Well, or somewhere out of hail, and there you must let me read—or perhaps I'll read aloud to you. Promise?"

"What're you reading?"

"The Bible."

Dicky pulled a face. "Well, the Bible's English, anyway," he said resignedly. The sound of a foreign tongue always made him feel pugnacious, and it was ever a question with him how, as a gentleman, to treat

a dead language. Death was respectable, but had its own obligations; obligations which Greek and Latin somehow ignored.

The house, known as Sabines, stood high on the slope of the midmost of Boston's three hills, in five acres of ground well set with elms. Captain Vyell had purchased the site some five years before, and had built himself a retreat away from the traffic that surged about his official residence by the waterside. Of its raucous noises very few—the rattle of a hawser maybe, or a boatswain's whistle, or the yells of some stentorian pilot—reached to penetrate the belt of elms surrounding the house and its green garth; but the Collector had pierced this woodland with bold vistas through which the eye overlooked Boston harbour with its moving panorama of vessels, the old fort then standing where now stands the Navy Yard, and the broad waters of the Charles sweeping out to the Bay.

For eighteen months he, the master of this demesne, had not set foot within its front gate; not once since the day when on a sudden resolution he had installed Ruth Josselin here, under ward of Miss Quiney, to be visited and instructed in theology, the arts, and the sciences, by such teachers as that unparagoned spinster might, with his approval, select. In practice he left it entirely to her, and Miss Quiney's taste in teachers was of the austerest. What nutriment (one might well have asked)

could a young mind extract from the husks of doctrine and of grammar purveyed to Ruth by the Reverend Malachi Hichens, her tutor in the Holy Scriptures and in the languages of Greece and Rome?

The answer is that youth, when youth craves for it, will draw knowledge even from the empty air and drink it through the very pores of the skin. Mr. Hichens might be dry—inhumanly dry—and his methods repellent; but there were the books, after all, and the books held food for her hunger, wine for her thirst. So too the harpsichord held music, though Miss Quiney's touch upon it was formal and lifeless. . . . In these eighteen months Ruth Josselin had been learning eagerly, teaching herself in a hundred ways and by devices of which she wist not. Yet always she was conscious of the final purpose of this preparation; nay, it possessed her, mastered her. For whatever fate her lord designed her, she would be worthy of it.

He never came. For sixteen months she had not seen him. Was it carelessly or in delicacy that he withheld his face? Or peradventure in displeasure? Her heart would stand still at times, and her face pale with the fear of it. She could not bethink her of having displeased him; but it might well be that he repented of his vast condescension. Almost without notice, and without any reason given, he had deported her to this house on the hill. . . . Yet, if he repented, why did he

continue to wrap her around with kindness? Why had she these good clothes, and food and drink, servants to wait on her, tutors to teach her—everything, in short, but liberty and young companions and his presence that most of all she desired and dreaded?

On the slope to the south-west of the house, in a dingle well screened with willow and hickory, a stream of water gushed from the living rock and had been channelled downhill over a stairway of flat boulders, so that it dropped in a series of miniature cascades before shooting out of sight over the top of a ferny hollow. The spot was a favourite one with Dicky, for between the pendent willow boughs, as through a frame, it overlooked the shipping and the broad bosom of the Charles. Ruth and he stole away to it, unperceived of Miss Quiney; to a nook close beside the spray of the fall, where on a boulder the girl could sit and read while Dick wedged his back into a cushion of moss, somewhat higher up the slope, and recumbent settled himself so as to bring (luxurious young dog!) her face in profile between him and the shining distance.

She had stipulated for silence while she read her lesson over; but he at once began to beg off.

"If you won't let me talk," he grumbled, "the least you can do is to read aloud."

"But it's the Bible," she objected.

"Oh, well, I don't mind. Only choose something

interesting. David and Goliath, or that shipwreck in the Acts."

"You don't seem to understand that this is a lesson, and I must read what Mr. Hichens sets. To-day it's about Hagar and Ishmael."

"I seem to forget about them; but fire away, and we'll hope there's a story in it."

Ruth began to read: "*And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she had borne unto Abraham, mocking her. Wherefore she said unto Abraham, Cast out this bondwoman. . . .*"

She read on. Before she ended Dicky had raised himself to a sitting posture. "The whole business was a dirty shame," he declared. "This Ishmael was his own son, eh? Then why should he cast out one son more than another?"

"There's a long explanation in the New Testament," said Ruth. "It's by St. Paul; and I daresay that Mr. Hichens too, if he sees anything difficult in it, will say that Ishmael stands for the bond and Isaac for the free, and Abraham had to do it, or the teaching wouldn't come right."

"He can't make out it was fair; nor St. Paul can't neither, not if you read it to him like you did to me," asserted Dicky.

"But I shall not," answered Ruth after a pause, "and it was rather clever of you to guess."

"Why not?"

"Because it would shock him. I used to find the Bible just as dull as he makes it out: but one day I heard Mr. Langton standing up for it. Mr. Langton said it was the finest book in the world and the most fascinating, if only you read it in the proper way; and the proper way, he said, is to forget all about its being divided into verses and just take it like any other book. I tried that, and it makes all the difference."

"You mean to say you like it?" asked Dicky, incredulous.

"I love it. I can't get away from the people in it. They are so splendid, one moment; and, the next, they are just too mean and petty for words; and the queer part of it is, they never see. They tell falsehoods, and they cheat, and the things they do to get into Palestine are simply disgusting—even if they had a shadow of a right there, which they haven't."

"But the land was promised to them."

She had a mind to criticise that promise, but checked her lips. He was a child, and she would do no violence to the child's mind.

Getting no answer, he considered for a while, and harked back. "But I don't see," he began, and halted, casting about to express himself. "I don't see why, if you read it like that to yourself, you should read it differently to old Hichens. That's a sort of pretending, you know."

She turned her eyes on him, and they were straight

and honest, as always. "Oh," said she, "you are a man, of course!"

Master Dicky blushed with pleasure.

"Men," she went on, "can go the straight way to get what they wish. The way is usually hard—it ought to be hard if the man is worth anything—but it is always quite straight and simple, else it is wrong. Now women have to win through men; which means that they must go round about."

"But old Hichens?"

To herself she might have answered, "He only is allowed to me here. On whom else can I practise to please? But, alas! I practise for a master who never comes!" Aloud she said, "You are excited to-day, Dicky. You have something to tell me."

"I should think I had."

"What is it?"

"It's about Uncle Harry. Dad showed me a letter from him to-day, and he's fought a splendid action down off Grand Bahama. Oh, you must hear! It seems he'd been beating about in his frigate for close on three months—on and off the islands on the look-out for those Spanish fellows that snap up our fruit-ships. Well, the water on board was beginning to smell; so he ran in through the nor'-west entrance of Providence Channel, anchored just inside, and sent his casks ashore to be refilled. They'd taken in the fresh stock, and the *Venus* was weighing for sea again almost before the

last boatload came alongside.—Can't you see her, the beauty! One anchor lifted, t'other chain shortened in, tops'ls and t'gallants'ls cast off, ready to cant her at the right moment——"

"Is that how they do it?"

"Of course it is. Well, just then Uncle Harry spied a boat beating in through the entrance. He had passed her outside two days before—one of those small open craft that dodge about groping for sponges—splendid naked fellows, the crew are. She had put about and run back in search of him, and her news was of a Spanish guarda-costa making down towards Havana with three prizes. Think of it! Uncle Harry was off and after them like a greyhound, and at sunrise next morning he sighted them in a bunch. He had the wind of them and the legs of them; there isn't a speedier frigate afloat than the *Venus*—although, he says, she was getting foul with weed: and after being chased for a couple of hours the Spaniard and two of the prizes hauled up and showed fight. Now for it! . . . He ran past the guarda-costa, drawing her fire, but no great harm done; shot up under the sterns of the two prizes, that were lying not two hundred yards apart; and raked 'em with half-a-broadside apiece—no time, you see, to reload between. It pretty well cleaned every Spaniard off their decks— Why are you putting your hands to your ears?"

"Go on," said Ruth, withdrawing them.

"By this, of course, he had lost way and given the guarda-costa the wind of him. But she couldn't reach the *Venus* for twenty minutes and more, because of the prizes lying helpless right in her way, and in half that time Uncle Harry had filled sail again and was manœuvring out of danger. Bit by bit he worked around her for the wind'ard berth, got it, bore down again and hammered her for close upon three hours. She fought, he says, like a rat in a sink, and when at last she pulled down her colours the two prizes had patched up somehow and were well off for Havana after the third, that had showed no fight from the beginning. Quick as lightning he gets his prisoners on board, heads off on the new chase, and by sundown has taken the prizes all three—the third one a timber-ship, full of mahogany. . . . That wasn't the end of his luck, either; for the captain of the guarda-costa turned out to be a blackguard that, two years ago, took a British captain prisoner and cut off his ears, which accounts for his fighting so hard. 'Didn't want to meet me if he could help it,' writes Uncle Harry, and says the man wouldn't haul down the flag till his crew had tied him up with ropes."

"What happened to him?"

"Uncle Harry shipped him off to England. This was from Carolina, where he sailed in with all the four vessels in convoy. And now, guess! He has refitted there, and is sailing around for Boston, and papa has

promised to ask him to take me for a cruise, to see if he can make a sailor of me!"

"But that won't be for years."

"Oh yes, it will. You can join the Navy at any age. They ship you on as a cabin-boy, or sometimes as the Captain's servant; and papa says that for the first cruise Uncle Harry's wife will look after me."

"But"—Ruth opened beautiful eyes of astonishment. "Your Uncle Harry is not married? Why, more than once you have told me that you would never take a wife when you grew up, but be like your uncle and live only for sailing a ship and fighting."

"He is, though. It happened at Carolina, whilst the *Venus* was refitting; and I believe her father is Governor there, or something of the sort, but I didn't read that part of the letter very carefully. There was a lot of silly talk in it, quite different from the fighting. I remember, though, he said he was coming around here for his honeymoon and I'm glad, on the whole."

"On the whole—when you've dreamed, all this while, of seeing your uncle and growing up to be like him!"

"I mean that on the whole I'm glad he is married. It—it shows the two things can go together after all; and, Ruth——"

She turned in some wonderment as his voice faltered, and wondered more at sight of his young face. It was crimson.

"No, please! I want you not to look," he entreated. "I want you to turn your face away and listen . . . Ruth," he blurted, "I love you better than anybody in the whole world."

"Dear Dicky!"

"—and I think you're the loveliest person that ever was—besides being the best."

"It's lovely of you at any rate, to think so." Ruth, forgetting his command, turned her eyes again on Dicky, and they were dewy. For indeed she loved him and his boyish chivalrous ways. Had he not been her friend from the first, taking her in perfect trust, and in the hour that had branded her and in her dreams seared her yet? Often, yet, in the mid-watches of the night she started out of sleep and lay quivering along her exquisite body from head to heel, while the awful writing awoke and crawled and ate again, etching itself upon her flesh.

"But—but it made me miserable!" choked Dicky.

"Miserable! Why?"

"Because I wanted to grow up and marry you," he managed to say defiantly. "And the two things didn't seem to fit at all. I couldn't make them fit. But of course," he went on in a cheerfuller voice, the worst of his confession over, "if Uncle Harry can be married, why shouldn't we?"

She bent her head low over the book. Calf-love is absurd, but so honest, so serious; and like all other

sweet natural foolishness should be sacred to the pure of heart.

"I ought to tell you something though," he went on gravely.

"Yes, Dicky! What is it?"

"Well, I don't quite know what it means, and I don't like to ask any one else. Perhaps you can tell me. . . . I wouldn't ask it if it weren't that I'd hate to take you in; or if I could find out any other way."

"But what is it, dear?"

"Something against me. I can't tell what, though I've looked at myself again and again in the glass, trying." He met her eyes bravely, with an effort.

—"Ruth, dear—what is a bastard?"

Ruth sat still. Her palms were folded, one upon another, over the book on her knees.

"But what is it?" he pleaded.

"It means," she said quietly, "a child whose father and mother are not married—not properly married."

A pause followed—a long pause—and the tumbling cascade sounded louder and louder in Ruth's ears, while Dicky considered.

"Do you think," he asked at length, "that papa was not properly married to my mother?"

"No, dear—no. And even if that were so, what difference could it make to my loving you?"

"It wouldn't make any! Sure?"

"Sure."

"But it might make a difference to papa," he persisted. "If ever papa had another child—like Abraham,you know—" Here he jumped to his feet, for she had risen of a sudden. "Why, what is the matter?"

She held out a hand. There were many dragonflies by the fall, and for the moment he guessed that one of them had stung her.

"Dicky," she said. "Whatever happens, you and I will be friends always."

"Always," he echoed, taking her hand and ready to search for the mark of the sting. But her eyes were fastened on the water bubbling from the well head.

A branch creaked aloft, and to the right of the well head the hickory bushes rustled and parted.

"So here are the truants!" exclaimed a voice. "Good-morning, Miss Josselin!"

CHAPTER II

MR. SILK

THE Reverend Nahum Silk, B.A., sometime of St. Alban's Hall, Oxford, had first arrived in America as a missioner seeking a sphere of labour in General Oglethorpe's new colony of Georgia. He was then (1733–4) a young man, newly admitted to priest's orders, and undergoing what he took to be a crisis of the soul. Sensual natures, such as his, not uncommonly suffer in youth a combustion of religious sentiment. The fervour is short-lived, the flame is expelled by its own blast, and leaves a house swept and garnished, inviting devils.

For the hard fare of Georgia he soon began to seek consolations, and early in the second year of his ministry a sufficiently gross scandal tumbled him out of the little colony. Lacking the grit to return to England and face out his relatives' displeasure, he drifted northwards to Massachusetts, and there had picked up with a slant of luck. A number of godly and well-to-do citizens of Boston had recently banded themselves into an association for supplying religious opportunities to the seamen frequenting the port, and to the Committee Mr.

Silk commended himself by a hail-fellow manner and a shrewdness of speech which, since it showed through a coat of unction, might be supposed to mean shrewdness in grain. Cunning indeed the man could be, for his short ends; but his shrewdness began and ended in a trick of talking, and in the conduct of life he trimmed sail to his appetites.

His business of missioner (or, as he jocosely put it, Chaplain of the Fleet) soon brought him to the notice of Captain Vyell, Collector of Customs, with whom by the same trick of speech (slightly adapted) he managed to ingratiate himself, scenting the flesh-pots. For he belonged to the tribe to whom a patron never comes amiss. Captain Vyell was amused by the man; knew him for a sycophant; but tolerated him at table and promoted him (in Batty Langton's phrase) to be his trencher chaplain. He and Langton took an easy malicious delight, over their wine, in shocking Mr. Silk with their free thought and seeing how "the dog swallowed it."

The dog swallowed his dirty puddings very cleverly, and with just so much show of protest as he felt to be due to his cloth. He had the accent of an English gentleman and enough of the manner to pass muster. But the Collector erred when he said that "Silk was only a beast in his cups," and he erred with a carelessness well-nigh wicked when he made the man Dicky's tutor.

This step had coincided with the relegation of Ruth and Miss Quiney to Sabines; but whether by chance or of purpose no one but the Collector could tell. Of his intentions towards the girl he said nothing, even to Batty Langton. Very likely they were not clear to himself. He knew well enough how fast and far gossip travelled in New England; and doubted not at all that his adventure at Port Nassau had within a few days been whispered and canvassed throughout Boston. His own grooms, no doubt, had talked. But he could take a scornful amusement in baffling speculation while he made up his own mind. In one particular only he had been prompt—in propitiating Miss Quiney. On reaching home, some hours ahead of the girl, he had summoned Miss Quiney to his library and told her the whole story. The interview on her part had been exclamatory and tearful; but the good lady with all her absurdities was a Christian. She was a woman, too, and delighted to serve an overmastering will. She had left him with a promise to lay her conscience in prayer before the Lord; and, next morning, Ruth's beauty had done the rest.

"Good-morning, Miss Josselin!"

Ruth started and glanced up the slope with a shiver. The voice of Mr. Silk always curdled her flesh.

"La! La!" went on Mr. Silk, nodding down admiration. "What a group to startle!—Cupid extracting a

thorn from the hand of Venus—or (shall we say?) the Love god, having wounded his mother in sport, kisses the scratch to make it well. Ha, ha!"

"Shall I continue, sir?" said Ruth, recovering herself. "The pair are surprised by a satyr who has crept down to the spring to bathe his aching head——"

"Hard on me, as usual!" Mr. Silk protested, climbing down the slope. "But 'tis the privilege of beauty to be cruel. As it happens, I drank moderately last night, and I come with a message from the Diana of these groves. Miss Quiney wishes to communicate to you some news I have had the honour to bring in a letter from Captain Vyell—or, as we must now call him, Sir Oliver."

"Sir Oliver?" echoed Ruth, not understanding at all.

"The *Fish-hawk* arrived in harbour this morning with the English mail-bags; and the Collector has letters informing him that his uncle, Sir Thomas Vyell, is dead after a short illness—the cause, jail fever, contracted while serving at Launceston, in Cornwall, on the Grand Jury."

"Captain Vyell succeeds?"

"To the title and, I believe, to very considerable estates. His uncle leaves no male child."

"Dicky had not told me of this."

"Because," explained the boy, "I didn't know what it meant, and I don't know now. Papa told me this morning that his uncle was dead, home in England;

but I'd never heard of him, and it slipped out of my mind. Can titles, as you call them, be passed on like that? And if papa died, should I get one? Or would it go to Uncle Harry?"

"It would go to your uncle," said Mr. Silk. "Now run along to the house and tell Miss Quiney that I have found the pair of you. She was getting anxious."

Dicky hesitated. He knew that Ruth had a horror of his tutor.

"Yes, run," she commanded, reading his glance. "We follow at once."

The boy scrambled up the slope. Mr. Silk looked after him and chuckled.

"Dicky don't know yet that there are two sides to a blanket."

Getting no answer—for she had turned and was stooping to pick up her book—he went on, "Vyell had a letter, among others, from the widow, Lady Caroline; and that, between ourselves, is the cause of my errand. She writes that she is taking a trip across here, to restore her nerves, and is bringing her daughter for company. The daughter, so near as I gather, is of an age near-about Vyell's. See?"

"I am afraid I do not." Ruth had recovered her book and her composure. A rose-flush showed yet on either cheek, but it lay not within Mr. Silk's competence to read so delicate a signal. "Will you explain?"

"Well"—he leered—"it did occur to me there might be some cleverness in the lady's search after consolation. Her daughter and our Collector being cousins—eh? At any rate, that's her first thought; to bring the girl—woman, if you prefer it—over and renew acquaintance with the heir. Must be excused if I misjudge her. Set it down to zeal for you, Miss Josselin."

"Willingly, Mr. Silk—if your zeal for me did not outrun my understanding."

"Yet you're clever. But you won't persuade me you don't see the difficulty. . . . Er—how shall I put it? The Collector—we'll have to get used to calling him Sir Oliver—is as cool under fire as any man this side of the Atlantic; fire of criticism, I mean. There's a limit though. He despises Colonial opinion—that's his pose; takes pride in despising it, encouraged by Langton. But England? his family?—that's another matter. An aunt—and that aunt an earl's daughter—If you'll believe me, Miss Josselin, I'm a man of family and know the sort. They're incredible. And the younger lady, if I may remind you, called Diana; which—er—may warn us that she, too, is particular about these things." Here Mr. Silk, having at length found his retort upon her similitude of the satyr, licked his lips.

Ruth drew up and stood tapping her foot. "May I beg to be told exactly what has happened, sir?"

"What has happened? What has happened is that

Vyell is placing Sabines at the disposal of his aunt and cousin for so long as they may honour Boston with their presence. He sends Miss Quiney word to pack and hold herself in readiness for a flitting. Whither? I cannot say; nor can he yet have found the temporary nest for you. But doubtless you will hear in due course. May I offer you my arm?"

"I thank you, no. Indeed we will part here, unless you have further business in the house—and I gather that your errand there is discharged. . . . One question—Captain Vyell sent his message by a letter, which Miss Quiney no doubt will show to me. Did he further commission you with a verbal one? You had better," she added quietly, "be particular about telling me the truth; for I may question him, and for a discovered falsehood he is capable of beating you."

"What I have said," stammered the clergyman, "was—er—entirely on my own responsibility. I—I conceived you would find it sympathetic—helpful perhaps. Believe me, Miss Josselin, I have considerable feeling for you and your—er—position."

"I thank you"—she dismissed him with a gentle curtsy. "I feel almost sure you have been doing your best."

CHAPTER III

MR. HICHENS

SHE turned and walked slowly back to the house. Once within the front door and out of his sight, she was tempted to rush across the hall and up the stairs to her own room. She was indeed gathering up her skirts for the run, when in the hall she almost collided with Mr. Hichens, who stood there with his nose buried in a vase of roses, while behind his back his hands interwove themselves and pulled each at the other's bony knuckles.

"Ah!" he faced about with a stiff bow, and a glance up at the tall clock. "You are late this morning, Miss Josselin. But I daresay my good brother Silk has been detaining you in talk?"

"On the contrary," answered Ruth, "his talk has rather hastened me than not."

They entered the library. "Miss Quiney tells me," he said, "that our studies are to suffer a brief interruption; that you are about to take a country holiday. You anticipate it with delight, I doubt not?"

"Have I been, then, so listless a scholar?" she asked, smiling.

"No," he answered. "I have never looked on you as eager for praise, or I should have told you that your progress—in Greek particularly—has been exceptional; for a young lady, I might almost say, abnormal."

"I am grateful to you at any rate for saying it now. It happens that just now I wanted something to give me back a little self-respect."

"But I do not suppose you so abnormal as, at your age, to undervalue a holiday," he continued. "It is only we elders who live haunted by the words 'Work while ye have the light.' If youth extract any moral from the brevity of life it is rather the pagan warning, *Collige rosas.*"

Her eyes rested on him, still smiling, but behind her smile she was wondering. Did he—this dry, sallow old man, with the knock-knees and ungainly frame, the soiled bands, the black suit, threadbare, hideous in cut, hideous in itself (Ruth had a child's horror of black) —did he speak thus out of knowledge, or was he but using phrases of convention? Ruth feared and distrusted all religious folk—clergymen above all; yet instinct had told her at the first that Mr. Hichens was honest, even good in an unlovely fashion; and by many small daily tests she had proved this. Was it possible that Mr. Hichens had ever gathered roses in his youth? Was it possible that, expecting Heaven and professing a spiritual joy in redemption, a man could symbolize his soul's state by wearing these dingy weeds? Had

he no sense of congruity, or was all religion so false in grain that it perverted not only the believer's judgment but his very senses, turning white into black for him, and making beauty and ugliness change places?

"For my part," said Mr. Hichens wistfully, "I regret the interruption; for I had even played with the thought of teaching you some Hebrew." He paused and sighed. "But doubtless the Almighty denies us these small pleasures for our good. . . . Shall we begin with our repetition? I forget the number of the Psalm?"

"The forty-fifth," said Ruth, finding the place and handing him the book. "*My heart is inditing of a good matter: I speak of the things which I have made unto the king.*". . . She recited the opening lines very quietly, but her voice lifted at the third verse. Beautiful words always affected her poignantly, but the language of the Bible more poignantly than any other, because her own unforgettable injury had been derived from it and sanctioned by it, and because at the base of things our enemies in this world are dearer to us than friends. They cling closer.

Yet,—and paradox though it be—the Bible was the more alive to her because, on Mr. Langton's hint, she had taken it like any other book, ignoring the Genevan division of verses and the sophisticated chapter headings. Thus studied, it had revenged itself by taking possession of her. It held all the fascination of the

East, and little by little unlocked it—Abraham at his tent door, Rebekah by the fountain, her own namesake Ruth in the dim threshing floor of Boaz, King Saul wrestling with his dark hour, the last loathly years of David, Jezebel at the window, Job on his dung-heap, Athaliah murdering the seed royal, and again Athaliah dragged forth by the stableway and calling *Treason! Treason!* . . . Bedouins with strings of camels, scent of camels by the city gate, clashing of distant cymbals, hush of fear—plot and counterplot in the apartments of the woman—outcries, lusts, hates—blood on the temple steps—blood oozing, welling across the gold—blood caking in spots upon illimitable desert sands—watchman by the wall—in the dark streets a woman with bleeding back and feet seeking and calling, "*I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if ye find my beloved—*"

"*Hearken, O daughter, and consider, incline thine ear*"—Ruth's voice swelled up on a full note: "*forget also thine own people and thy father's house;*

"*So shall the King have pleasure in thy beauty: for he is thy lord, and worship thou him.*"

"Excuse me—'*for he is thy Lord God,*'" corrected Mr. Hichens. . . . "We are taking the Prayer Book's version."

"I changed to the Bible version on purpose," Ruth confessed; "and 'lord' ought to have a small 'l.' The Prayer Book makes nonsense of it. They are bringing in the bride, the princess, to her lord. *She is all*

glorious within, her clothing is of wrought gold. She shall be brought unto the King in raiment of needlework: the virgins that be her fellows shall bear her company—"

"The Hebrew," said Mr. Hichens, blinking over his own text which he had hastily consulted, "would seem to bear you out, or at least to leave the question open. But, after all, it matters little, since, as the chapter heading explains in the Authorized Version, the supposed bride is the Church, and the bridegroom, therefore, necessarily Our Lord."

"Do you think that, or anything like that, was meant by the man who wrote it?" asked Ruth, rebellious. "The title says, 'To the Chief Musician upon Shoshannim'—whatever that may mean."

"It means that it was to be sung to a tune called 'Shoshannim' or 'Lilies'—doubtless a well-known one."

"It has a beautiful name, then; and he calls it too 'Maschil, a Song of Loves.'"

"Historically no doubt you are right," agreed Mr. Hichens. "The song is undoubtedly later than David, and was written as a Prothalamion for a royal bride. It is, as you say, exceedingly beautiful; but perhaps we had best confine our attention to its allegorical side. You probably do not guess who the bride was?"

"No," Ruth admitted. "Who was she?"

"It is generally admitted, I believe, to have been written as a bridal hymn for Queen Jezebel."

"O—oh!" Ruth bit her lip, but had to laugh in spite of herself.

CHAPTER IV

VASHTI

THE first bad suggestion almost certainly came from Mr. Silk. Two or three of the company afterwards put their heads together and, comparing recollections, agreed that either Silk or Manley had started it. Beyond the alternative they could not trace it.

But the whole table, they admitted, had been to blame, and pretty damnably. To be sure they were drunk, every man Jack of them, the Collector included. The Collector, indolent by nature but capable of long stretches of work at a pinch, had been at his desk since six o'clock in the morning. The news brought by the *Fish-hawk* had reached him at five; and after bathing, dressing, and drinking his chocolate, he had started to write, and had been writing letters all day. The most of these were lengthy, addressed to England, to his relatives, his London lawyers, the steward at Carwithiel. . . . The Surveyor and Deputy-Collector could deal—as they usually did—with the official correspondence of the Custom House; his own Secretary had the light task of penning a score of invitations to dinner; but these letters of condolence and private

business must be written by his own hand, as also a note to Governor Shirley formally announcing his accession and new title.

The Collector dined at five. He laid down his pen at four, having written for ten hours almost at a stretch, declining all food—for he hated to mix up work with eating and drinking. Before dressing for dinner he refreshed himself with another bath; but he came to table with a jaded brain and a stomach fasting beyond appetite for food; and the wine was champagne.

Miss Quiney and Ruth Josselin, seated that evening in the drawing-room at Sabines, were startled at eight o'clock or thereabouts by a knocking on the front door. Miss Quiney looked up from her tambour-work, with hand and needle suspended in mid-air, and gazed across at Ruth, who, seated at the harpsichord, had been singing softly—murmuring rather—the notes of Ben Jonson's *Charis her Triumph*—

> "Have you seen but a bright Lillie grow
> Before rude hands have touch'd it?"—

but desisted at the noise and slewed her body half around, letting her fingers rest on the keys.

"Who in the world—at this hour?" demanded Miss Quiney.

A serving-maid ushered in Manasseh.

The tall black halted a little within the doorway,

saluted and stood grinning respectfully, his white teeth gleaming in the candle-light.

"Yo' pardon, ladies. His Honah sends to say he entertainin' to-night. Plenty people drink his Honah's health an' long life to Sir Olivah Vyell. He wish partick'ly Mis' Josselin drink it. He tol' me run, get out sedan-chair an' fetch Mis' Josselin along; fetch her back soon as she likes. Chairmen at de door dis moment, waitin'. I mak' 'em run."

Ruth stood up. Her hand went to the edge of her bodice open below the throat.

"Must I?" she asked, turning from Manasseh to Miss Quiney. Her voice was tense.

"I—I think so, dear," Miss Quiney answered after a pause. "It is a command, almost; and to-night naturally Captain Vyell—Sir Oliver—has a claim on our congratulations."

"You tell me to go? . . . Oh! but let me be sure you know what you are advising." She faced the negro again. "What guests is Sir Oliver entertaining?"

Manasseh enumerated a dozen.

"All gentlemen! So, you see!"

"Captain—Sir Oliver (bless me, how I forget!) has an aversion from ladies' society—Boston ladies. . . . It is not for me to criticise, but the distaste is well known."

"And the gentlemen, Manasseh—they will have taken a great deal of wine, by now?"

Manasseh spread out his hands, and again his teeth gleamed. "To be sho' Mis' Josselin; it is not ebery day in the yeah dat Cap'n Vyelle become Sir Olivah——"

"I did not ask you," interrupted Ruth coldly, "to excuse your errand. . . . And now, Tatty dear, do you still bid me to go?"

"On the contrary, I forbid it."

Ruth stepped close to the little lady. Said she, standing straight before her and looking down, "It cost you some courage to say that."

"It may cost me more to-morrow; but I am not afraid."

"My brave Tatty! But the courage is thrown away, for I am going."

"You do not mean this?"

"I do mean it. My master sends for me. You know what duty I owe him."

"He is just. He will thank you to-morrow that you disobeyed."

"I shall not disobey."

Little Miss Quiney, looking up into her ward's eyes, argued this point no further. "Very well," said she. "Then I go too." She closed her mouth firmly, squaring her jaw.

"But in the sedan there is room for one only."

"Then I go first," said Miss Quiney, "and the chair shall return for you. That," she went on, falling back

upon her usual pedantic speech, "presents no difficulty whatever to me. What I wear does not matter—the gentlemen will not regard it. But you must dress in what you have of the best. It—it will assist you. Being without experience, you probably have no notion how dress assists one's self-respect."

"I think I have some little notion," Ruth assured her demurely.

"And while the chair is taking me and returning, you will have good time to dress. On no account are you to hurry. . . . It is essential that at no point—at *no* point, dear—you allow yourself to be hurried, or to show any trace of hurry."

Ruth nodded, slowly. "Yes, Tatty. I understand. But little ljoness that you are, do *you?* You will be alone, and for some time with these—with these——"

"I have never mentioned it to a living soul before," said Miss Quiney, dismissing Manasseh with a wave of the hand and closing the door upon him; "but I had an eldest brother—in the Massachusetts militia—who, not to put too fine a point on it, was sadly addicted to the bottle. It shortened his days. . . . A bright young genius, of which we hoped much, and (I fear me) not all unselfishly, for our family was impoverished. But he went astray. Towards the end he would bring home his boon companions—I will say this for poor dear George, that his footsteps, at their unsteadiest, ever tended homewards; he never affected low haunts—

and it fell to me as the eldest daughter of the house, to keep his hospitality within bounds——"

"Dear Tatty!" Ruth stooped and kissed the plain little face, cutting short the narrative. It was strange to note how these two of diverse ages—between whom for the length of their acquaintance no dispute of mastery had arisen—now suddenly and in quick alternation, out of pure love, asserted will against will. "You shall tell me to-morrow. (I always knew that your meekness and weakness were only pretence.) But just now we must hurry."

"Hurry, as I must repeat," answered Miss Quiney primly, smoothing down the front of her grey satin skirt, "is—will be—our capital mistake. For me, I need in this weather but a shawl. I am ready. . . . Go to your room . . . and let me enjoy a certain deliberation even in crossing the hall. Manasseh is there, and before servants—even a negro— The white brocade if I may advise; it is fresher than the rose-coloured silk —and the hair combed a trifle higher off the brows. That, with the brocade, will correct your girlishness somewhat. Brocades are for dignity, and it is dignity we chiefly need to-night. . . . Shall I send Selina to you? No? Well, she would be persuading you to some new twist or experiment with your hair, and you are better without her. Also I shall want a last word with you when I have fetched my cloak, and Selina is better out of the way."

Miss Quiney's last word was a curious one. It took the form of a pearl necklace, her one possession of value, last surviving heirloom of the Quineys of whom she was the last surviving descendant: her last tangible evidence, too, of those bygone days. She never wore it, and it never saw the light save when she unlocked the worn jewel-case to make sure that her treasure had not been stolen.

She entered Ruth's room with it furtively. Despite her injunction against hurry, the girl had already indued the white brocade and stood before the mirror conning herself. She wore no jewels; she owned none.

"Shut your eyes, dear," commanded Miss Quiney, and, stealing up behind her, slipped and clasped the necklace about her throat, then fell back, admiring the reflection in the glass.

"Oh, Tatty!"

But Ruth, too, had to pause for a moment to admire. When she turned, Miss Quiney, forgetting her own injunction, had stolen in haste from the room.

The girl's eyes moistened. For a moment she saw herself reflected from the glass in a blur. Then through the blur the necklace took shape, point by point of light, pearl by pearl, until the whole chain grew definite in the parting of the bodice, resting on the rise of her young bosom.

Yes, and the girl saw that it was good.

A string of words danced upon her brain, as though the mirrored pearls reflected them.

She shall be brought unto the King . . . the virgins that be her fellows shall bear her company.

CHAPTER V

SIR OLIVER'S HEALTH

"Dr lady is here, yo' Honah!"

Manasseh announced it from the doorway and stood aside. Of the company four had already succumbed and slid from their chairs. The others staggered to their feet, Sir Oliver as promptly as any. With a face unnaturally white he leaned forward, clutching the edge of the long oval table, and stared between the silver candelabra down the broken ranks of his guests—Mr. Silk, purple of face as his patron was pale; Ned Manley, maundering the tag of a chorus; Captain St. Maur, Captain Goodacre, and Ensign Lumley, British officers captured by the French at Fort Chanseau and released to live at Boston on parole until the war should end; Mr. Fynes, the Collector's secretary; Mr. Bythesea, Deputy-Collector; young Shem Hacksteed and young Denzil Baynes, sons of wealthy New Englanders, astray for the while, and sowing their wild oats in a society openly scornful of New England traditions.

Batty Langton's was the chair nearest the door, and Batty Langton was the one moderately sober man of

the company. He had not heard, in time to interfere, the proposal to send for Ruth—it had started somewhere at the Collector's end of the table. But trifler though he was, he thought it cruel to the girl—a damnable shame—and pulled himself together to prevent what mischief he might. At the same time he felt curious to see her, curious to learn if these many months of seclusion had fulfilled the Collector's wager that Ruth Josselin would grow to be the loveliest woman in America. At Manasseh's announcement he faced about, and, with a gasp, clutched at the back of his chair.

In the doorway stood little Miss Quiney.

It was so ludicrous a disappointment that for the moment no one found speech. Langton heard Goodacre, behind him, catch his breath upon a wondering "O—oh!" and felt the shock run down the table along the unsteady ranks. At the far end a voice—Mr. Silk's—cackled and burst unto unseemly laughter.

Langton swung round. "Mr. Fynes," he called sharply, "oblige me, please, by silencing that clergyman—with a napkin in his mouth, if necessary."

He turned again to Miss Quiney. "Madam," he said, offering his arm, "let me lead you to a seat by Sir Oliver."

The little lady accepted with a curtsy. A faint flush showed upon either cheek-bone, and in her eyes could be read the light of battle. It commanded his admi-

ration the more that her small arm trembled against his sleeve. "The courage of it," he murmured, "and Miss Quiney of all women!"

She needed courage. The Collector's handsome face greeted her with a scowl and a hard stare; he could be intractable in his cups.

"Excuse me, madam, but I sent for Miss Josselin."

She answered him, but first made low obeisance. "Ruth Josselin will attend, sir, with all despatch. The sedan is capable of accommodating but one at a time."

There stood an empty chair on the Collector's right. To set it for her Mr. Langton had, as a preliminary, to stoop and drag aside the legs of a reveller procumbent on the floor. The effort flushed him; but Miss Quiney, with an inclination of the head, slipped into the seat as though she had seen nothing unusual.

"And it gives me the occasion," she continued respectfully, as her eyes passed over the form of young Manley opposite, who stood with his glass at an angle, spilling its wine on the mahogany, "of expressing—I thank you. . . . What? Is it Mr. Silk? A pleasure, indeed! . . . Yes, I rarely take wine, but on such an occasion as this—an occasion, as I was saying, to felicitate Sir Oliver Vyell on his accession to a title which we, who have served him, best know his capacity to adorn."

"Oh, damn!" growled the Collector under his breath.

"Half a glassful only!" Miss Quiney entreated, as Mr. Silk poured for her. She was, in fact, desperately telling herself that if she attempted to lift a full glass, her shaking hand would betray her.

"Yo' Honah—Mis' Josselin!"

Mr. Langton had caught the sound of Manasseh's footfall in the corridor without, and was on the alert before the girl entered. But at sight of her in the doorway he fell back for a moment.

Yes, the Collector's promise had come true—and far more than true. She was marvellous.

It was by mere beauty, too, that she dazzled, helped by no jewels but the one plain rope of pearls at her throat. She stood there holding herself erect, but not stiffly, with chin slightly lifted; not in scorn, nor yet in defiance, though you were no sooner satisfied of this than a tiniest curve of the nostril set you doubting. But no; she was neither scornful nor defiant—alert rather, as a fair animal quivering with life, confronting some new experience that for the moment it fails to read. Or—borrowing her morning's simile, to convert it—you might liken her to huntress-maiden Diana, surprised upon arrested foot; instep arched, nostril quivering to the unfamiliar, eyes travelling in sudden speculation over a group of satyrs in a glade. For a certainty that poise of the chin emphasized the head's perfect carriage; as did the fashion of her head-tire,

too—the hair drawn straight above the brows and piled superbly, to break and escape in two careless love-locks on the nape of the neck—in the ripple of each a smile, correcting the goddess to the woman. The right arm hung almost straight at her side, the hand ready to gather a fold of the white brocaded skirt; the left slanted up to her bosom, where its finger-tips touched the stem of a white rose in the lace at the parting of the bodice. . . .

So she stood—for ten seconds maybe—under the droop of the heavy curtain Manasseh held aside for her. The hush of the room was homage to her beauty. Her gaze, passing between the lines of his guests, sought the Collector. It was fearless, but held a hint of expectancy. Perhaps she waited for him to leave his place, and come forward to receive her. But he made no motion to do this; not being, in fact, sufficient master of his legs.

"Good-evening, my lord!" She swept him a curtsey. "You sent for me?"

Before he could answer, she had lowered her eyes. They rested on a chair that happened to stand empty beside Batty Langton, and a slight inclination of the head gave Langton to understand that she wished him to offer it. He did so, and she moved to it. The men, embarrassed for a moment by their host's silence—they had expected him to answer her, but he stood staring angrily as one rebuffed—followed her cue and reseated

themselves. He, too, dropped back in his chair, leaned forward for the decanter, and poured himself more wine. The buzz of talk revived, at first a word or two here and there, tentative after the check, then more confidently. Within a minute the voices were babel again.

Batty Langton pondered. A baronet should not be addressed as "my lord," and she had been guilty of a solecism. At the same time her manner had been perfect; her carriage admirably self-possessed. Her choice of a seat, too, at the end of the table and furthest from Sir Oliver—if she had come unwillingly—had been wittily taken, and on the moment, and with the appearance of deliberate ease.

"They will be calling on you presently to drink our host's health," he suggested, clearing a space of the table in front of her and collecting very dexterously two or three unused wine-glasses. Champagne? . . . Miss Quiney is drinking champagne, I see, though her neighbours have deserted it for red wine. Sir Oliver, by the way, grows lazy in pushing the decanters. . . . Shall I signal to him?"

"On no account. Champagne, if you please . . . though I had rather you kept it in readiness."

"I am sorry, Miss Josselin, but there you ask of me the one thing impossible. I cannot abide to let wine stand and wait; and champagne—watch it, how it protests!" He filled her glass and refilled his own. "By

the way," he added, sinking his voice, "one is permitted to congratulate a débutante?"

"And to criticise."

"There was nothing to criticise except— Oh, well, a trifle. At home in England we don't 'my lord' a mere baronet, you know."

"But since he *is* my lord?" She smiled gently, answering his puzzled stare. "How, otherwise, should I be here?"

Mr. Langton took wine to digest this. He shook his head. "You must forgive me. It is clear that I am drunk—abominably drunk—for I miss the point——"

"You accuse yourself unjustly."

"Do I? Well, I have certainly drunk a deal more wine than is good for me, and it will be revenged to-morrow. As a rule,"—he glanced around at his fellow-topers—"I pride myself that in head and legs I am inexpugnable. We all have our gifts; and i' faith until a moment ago I was patting myself on the back for owning this one."

"And why, Mr. Langton?"

"On the thought, Mistress Josselin, that I had cut out the frigate, as our tars say, and towed the prize to moorings before the others could fire a gun."

"I had hoped," she murmured, and bent her eyes on the wine-bubbles winking against the rim of her glass, "you did it in simple kindness."

"Well," he owned slowly, "and so I did. This

belittling of good intentions, small enough to begin with, is a cursed habit, and I'll renounce it for once. It was little—it was nothing; yet behold me eager to be thanked."

"I thank you." She fingered the stem of the glass, not lifting her eyes. "But you have belittled me, too. I read it in books, and here on the threshold, as I step outside of books, you meet me with it. We women are always, it seems, poor ships, beating the seas, fleeing capture; and our tackle, our bravery—" She broke off, and sat musing, while her fingers played with the base of the glass.

"I take back my metaphors, Miss Josselin. I admit myself no buccaneer, but a simple ass who for once pricked ears on an honest impulse."

"That is better. But hush! Mr. Manley, yonder, is preparing to sing."

Mr. Manley, a young protégé of the Collector's, had a streak of genius as an architect and several lesser gifts, among them a propensity for borrowing and a flexible tenor voice. He trolled an old song, slightly adapted—

"Here's a health unto Sir Oliver,
With a fal-la-la, lala-la-la;
Confusion to his enemies,
With a fal-la-la, lala-la-la;
And he that will not drink his health,
I wish him neither wit nor wealth,
Nor yet a rope to hang himself—
With a fal-la-la, lala-la-la."

The effort was applauded. Above the applause the bull voice of Mr. Silk shouted,—

"But Miss Josselin has not drunk it yet. Langton monopolises her. Miss Josselin! What has Miss Josselin to say?"

The cry was taken up. "Miss Josselin! Miss Josselin!"

Batty Langton arose, glass in hand. "Is it a toast, gentlemen?" He glanced at Sir Oliver, who sat sombre, not lifting his eyes. "Our host permits me. . . . Then I give you 'Miss Josselin!'" Acclamations drowned his voice here, and the men sprang up, waving their glasses. Sir Oliver stood with the rest.

"Miss Josselin! Miss Josselin!" they shouted, and drank what their unsteady hands left unspilt. Langton waited, his full glass half upraised.

"Miss Josselin," he repeated very deliberately on the tail of the uproar, "who honours this occasion as Sir Oliver's ward."

For about five seconds an awkward silence held the company. Their fuddled memories retained scraps of gossip concerning Ruth, her history and destiny—gossip scandalous in the main. One or two glanced at the Collector, who had resumed his seat—and his scowl.

"The more reason she should drink his health." Again Mr. Silk was fugleman.

His voice braved it off on the silence. Ruth was

raising her glass. Her eyes sought Miss Quiney's; but Miss Quiney's, lifted heavenward, had encountered the ceiling upon which Mr. Manley had recently depicted the hymeneals of Venus and Vulcan, not omitting Mars; and the treatment—a riot of the nude—had for the moment put the redoubtable little lady out of action.

Ruth leaned forward in her seat, lifting her glass high. It brimmed, but she spilled no drop.

"To Sir Oliver!"

CHAPTER VI

CAPTAIN HARRY AND MR. HANMER

"GUESTS, has he?—Out of my road, you rascal!—Guests? I'll warrant there's none so welcome——"

A good cheery voice—a voice the curtain could not muffle—rang it down the corridor as on the note of a cornet.

The wine was at Ruth's lip, scarcely wetting it. She lowered the glass steadily and turned half-about in her chair at the moment when, as before a whirlwind, the curtain flew wide and Manasseh burst in on the run with a stranger at his heels.

"Oliver!" The stranger drew himself up in the doorway—a well-knit figure of a man, clear of eye, bronzed of hue, clad in blue sea-cloth faced with scarlet, and wearing a short sword at the hip. "Where's my Oliver?" he shouted. "You'll forgive my voice, gentlemen. I'm Harry Vyell, at your service, fresh from shipboard, and not hoarse with anthems like old what-d'ye-call-him." Running his gaze along the table, he sighted the Collector and broke into a view-halloo.

"Oliver! Brother Noll!" Captain Harry made a

second run of it, caught his foot on the prostrate toper whom Langton had dragged out of Miss Quiney's way, and fell on his brother's neck. Recovering himself with a "damn," he clapped his left hand on Sir Oliver's shoulder, seized Sir Oliver's right in his grip and started pump-handling—"as though," murmured Langton, "the room were sinking with ten feet of liquor in the hold."

"Harry—is it Harry?" Sir Oliver stammered, and made a weak effort to rise.

"Lord! You're drunk!" Captain Harry crowed the cheerful discovery. "Well, and I'll join you—but in moderation, mind! Newly married man—if some one will be good enough to pass the decanter? . . . My dear fellow! . . . Cast anchor half an hour ago—got myself rowed ashore hot-foot to shake my Noll by the hand. Lord, brother, you can't think how good it feels to be married! Sally won't be coming ashore to-night; the hour's too late, she says; so I'm allowed an hour's liberty." Here the uxorious fellow paused on a laugh, indicating that he found irony in the word. "But Sally—capital name, Sally, for a sailor's wife; she's Sarah to all her family, Sal to me—Sally is cunning. Sally gives me leave ashore, but on condition I take Hanmer to look after me. He's my first lieutenant—first-rate officer, too—but no ladies' man. Gad!" chuckled Captain Harry, "I believe he'd run a mile from a petticoat. But where is he? Hi, Hanmer! step aft-along here and be introduced!"

A tall grave man, who had entered unnoticed, walked past the line of guests and up to his captain. He too wore a suit of blue with scarlet facings, and carried a short sword or hanger at his belt. He stood stiffly, awaiting command. The candle-light showed, beneath his right cheek bone, the cicatrix of a recent wound.

But Captain Harry, slewing round to him, was for the moment bereft of speech. His gaze had happened, for the first time, on little Miss Quiney.

"Eh?" he stammered, recovering himself. "Your pardon, ma'am. I wasn't aware that a lady—" Here his eyes, travelling to the end of the table, were arrested by the vision of Ruth Josselin. "Wh-e-ew!" he whistled, under his breath.

"Sir Oliver—" Batty Langton stood up.

"Hey?" The name gave Captain Harry yet another shock. He spun about again upon his brother. "'Sir Oliver?' *What's* he saying?"

"You've not heard?" said the Collector, gripping his words slowly, one by one. "No, of course you've not. Harry, our uncle is dead."

There was a pause. "Poor old boy!" he muttered. "Used to be kind to us, Noll, after his lights. If it hadn't been for his womenkind."

"They're coming across to visit me, damn 'em!"

"What? Aunt Carrie and Di'? . . . Good Lord!"

"They're on the seas at this moment—may be here within the week."

"Good Lord!" Captain Harry repeated, and his eyes wandered again to Ruth Josselin. "Awkward, hey? . . . But I say, Noll—you really *are* Sir Oliver! Dear lad, I give you joy, and with all my heart. . . . Gad, here's a piece of news for Sally!"

Again he came to a doubtful halt, and again with his eyes on Ruth Josselin. He was not a quick-witted man, outside of his calling, nor a man apt to think evil; but he had been married a month, and this had been long enough to teach him that women and men judge by different standards.

"Sir Oliver," repeated Langton, "Miss Josselin craves your leave to retire."

"Yes, dear." Miss Quiney launched an approving nod towards her. "I was about to suggest it, with Sir Oliver's leave. The hour is late, and by the time the sedan-chair returns for me——"

"There is no reason, Tatty, why we should not return together," said Ruth quietly. "The night is fine; and, with Manasseh for escort, I can walk beside your chair."

"Pardon me, ladies," put in Mr. Silk. "Once in the upper town, you may be safe enough; but down here by the quay the sh—sailors—I know 'em—it's my buish-ness. 'Low me—join the eshcort."

But here, perceived by few in the room, a somewhat remarkable thing happened. Mr. Hanmer, who had stood hitherto like a statue, put out a hand and laid it on Mr. Silk's shoulder; and there must have been

some power in that grip, for Mr. Silk dropped into his seat without another word.

Captain Harry saw it, and broke into a laugh.

"Why, to be sure! Hanmer's the very man! The rest of ye too drunk—meaning no offence; and, for me, —well, for me, you see there's Sally to be reckoned with." He laughed aloud at this simple jocularity. "Hanmer!"

"Yes, sir."

"Convoy."

"If you wish it, sir." The lieutenant bowed stiffly; but it was to be noted that the scar, which had hitherto showed white on a bronzed cheek, now reddened on a pale one.

Miss Quiney hesitated. "The gentleman, as a stranger to Boston——"

"I'll answer for Hanmer, ma'am. You'll get little talk out of him; but, be there lions at large in Boston, Jack Hanmer 'll lead you past 'em."

"Like Mr. Greatheart in the parable," spoke up Ruth, whose eyes had been taking stock of the proposed escort, though he stood in the penumbra and at half the room's length away. "Tatty—if my lord permit and Lieutenant Hanmer be willing——"

She stood up, and with a curtsey to Sir Oliver, swept to the door. Miss Quiney pattered after; and Mr. Hanmer, with a bow and hand lifted to the salute, stalked out at their heels.

"I'll warrant Jack Hamner 'd liefer walk up to a gun," swore Captain Harry as the curtain fell behind them. "He bolts from the sight of Sally. I'll make Sally laugh over this." But here he pulled himself up and added beneath his voice, "I can't tell her, though."

The road as it climbed above the town toward Sabines grew rough and full of pitfalls. Even by the light of the full moon shining between the elms Miss Quiney's chairmen were forced to pick their way warily, so that the couple on the sidewalk—which in comparison was well paved—easily kept abreast of them.

Ruth walked with the free grace of a Dryad. The moonlight shone now and again on her face beneath the arch of her whimple; and once, as she glanced up at the heavens, Mr. Hanmer—interpreting that she lifted her head to a scent of danger, and shooting a sidelong look despite himself—surprised a lustre as of tears in her eyes; whereupon he felt ashamed, as one who had intruded on a secret.

"Mr. Hanmer."

"Ma'am?"

"I have a favour to beg. . . . Is it true, by the way," she asked mischievously, "that to talk with a woman distresses you?"

"Ma'am——"

"My name is Ruth Josselin."

Mr. Hanmer either missed to hear the correction or heard and put it aside. "Been at sea all my life," he explained. "They caught me young."

Ruth looked sideways at him and laughed—a liquid little laugh, much like the bubbling note of a thrush. "You could not have given an answer more pat, sir. I want to speak to you about a child, caught young and about to be taken to sea. You are less shy with children, I hope?"

"Not a bit," confessed Mr. Hanmer. He added, "They take to me, though—the few I've met."

"Dick will take to you, for certain. Dicky is Sir Oliver's child."

"I didn't know—" Mr. Hanmer came to a full stop.

"No," said Ruth, as though she echoed him. "He is eight years old almost." Her eyes looked straight ahead, but she was aware that his had scanned her face for a moment, and almost she felt his start of reassurance.

"So, the child being a friend of mine, and his father having promised him a cruise in the *Venus*, you see that I very much want to know what manner of lady is Captain Harry's wife; and that I could not ask you point-blank because you would have set the question down to idle curiosity. . . . It might make all the difference to him," she added, getting no answer.

"A child of eight, and the country at war!" Mr.

Hanmer muttered. "His father must know that we cruise ready for action."

"I tell you, sir, what Dicky told me this morning."

"But it's impossible!"

"To that, sir, I might find you half a dozen answers. To begin with, we all know—and Sir Oliver perhaps, from private information, knows better than any of us—that peace is in sight. Here in the northern Colonies it has arrived already; the enemy has no fleet on this side of the world, and on this coast no single ship to give you any concern."

"Guarda-costas? There may be a few left on the prowl, even in these latitudes. I don't believe it for my part; we've accounted for most of 'em. Still——"

"And Captain Harry thinks so much of them that he sails from Carolina to Boston with his bride on board!"

"You are right, Miss Josselin, and you are wrong. . . . Mistress Vyell has come to Boston in the *Venus;* and by reason that her husband, when he started, had as little acquaintance with fear for others as for himself. But if she return to Carolina it will be by land or when peace is signed. Love has made the Captain think; and thought has made him—well, with madam on board, I am thankful—" He checked himself.

"You are thankful he did not sight a guarda-costa." She concluded the sentence for him, and walked some

way in silence, while he at her side was silent, being angry at having said so much.

"Yet Captain Harry is recklessly brave?" she mused.

"To the last degree, Miss Josselin," Mr. Hanmer agreed eagerly. "To the last degree within the right military rules. Fighting a ship's an art, you see."

It seemed that she did not hear him. "It runs in the blood," she said. She was thinking, fearfully yet exultantly, of this wonderful power of women, for whose sake cowards will behave as heroes and heroes turn to cowards.

They had outstripped the chairmen, and were at the gate of Sabines. He held it open for her. She bethought her that his last two or three sentences had been firmly spoken, that his voice had shaken off its husky stammer, and on the impulse of realized power she took a fancy to hear it tremble again.

"But if madam will not be on board to look after Dicky, the more will he need a friend. Mr. Hanmer, will you be that friend?"

"You are choosing a rough sort of nursemaid."

"But will you?" She faced him, wonderful in the moonlight.

His eyes dropped. His voice stammered, "I—I will do my best, Miss Josselin."

She held out a hand. He took it perforce in his rope-roughened paw, held it awkwardly for a moment, and released it as one lets a bird escape.

Ruth smiled. "The best of women," ran a saying of Batty Langton's, "if you watch 'em, are always practising, even the youngest, as a kitten plays with a leaf."

They stood in silence, waiting for the chair to overtake them.

"Tatty, you are a heroine!"

Miss Quiney, unwinding a shawl from her head under the hall-lamp, released herself from Ruth's embrace. Her nerve had been strained and needed a recoil.

"Maybe," she answered snappishly. "For my part, I'd take more comfort, just now, to be called a respectable woman."

Ruth laughed, kissed her again, and stood listening to the footsteps as they retreated down the gravelled way. Among them her ear distinguished easily the firm tread of Mr. Hanmer.

CHAPTER VII

FIRST OFFER

A LITTLE before noon next day word came to her room that Sir Oliver had called and desired to speak with her.

She was not unprepared. She had indeed dressed with special care in the hope of it; but she went to her glass and stood for a minute or two, touching here and there her seemly tresses.

Should she keep him—keep him even a long while —waiting? . . . He deserved it. . . . But ah, no! She was under a vow never to be other than forthright with him; and the truth was, his coming filled her with joy.

"I am glad you have come." These, in fact, were her first words as he turned to face her in the drawing-room. He had been standing by the broad window-seat, staring out on the roses.

"You guess, of course, what has brought me?" He had dressed himself with extreme care. His voice

was steady, his eye clear, and only a touch of pallor told of the overnight debauch. "I am here to be forgiven."

"Who am I, to forgive?"

"If you say that, you make it three times worse for me. Whatever you are does not touch my right to ask your pardon, or my need to be forgiven—which is absolute."

"No," she mused, "you are right. . . . Have you asked pardon of Tatty?"

"I have, ten minutes ago. She sent the message to you."

"Tatty was heroic"—Ruth paused on the reminiscence with a smile—"and, if you will believe me, quite waspish when I told her so."

"You should have refused to come. You might have known that I was drunk, or I could never have sent——"

"How does it go?" She stood before him, puckering her brows a little as she searched to remember the words—"'*On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded the seven chamberlains*——'"

"Spare me."

"'*—to bring Vashti the queen before the king with the crown royal, to show the people and the princes her beauty, for she was fair to look on.*' Do I quote immodestly, my lord?"

"Not immodestly," he answered. "For I think—I'll be sworn—no woman ever had half your beauty without knowing it. But you quote *mal à propos.* Queen Vashti refused to come."

"'*—Therefore was the king very wroth, and his anger burned in him.*'"

"I think, again, that you were not the woman to obey any such fear."

"No. Queen Vashti refused to come, being a queen. Whereas I, my lord—

> "'Being your slave, what should I do but tend
> Upon the hours and times of your desire?'"

"My slave?" he asked. "Setting aside last night—when I was disgustingly drunk—have you a single excuse for using that word?"

"Of your giving, none. You have been more than considerate. Of my own choosing, yes."

He stared.

"At any rate Tatty is not your slave," she went on, and he smiled with her. "I am glad you asked Tatty's pardon. Did she forgive you easily?"

"Too easily. She was aware, she said, that gentlemen would be gentlemen."

"She must have meant precisely the reverse."

"Was I pretty bad?"

She put a hand across her eyes as if to brush the image from them. "What matters the degree? It was

another man seated and wearing my lord's body. *That* hurt."

"By God, Ruth, it shall never happen again!"

She winced as he spoke her name, and her colour rose. "Please make no promise in haste," she said.

"Excuse me, when a man takes an oath for life, the quicker he's through with it the better—at least that's the way with us Vyells. It's trifles—like getting drunk, for instance—we do deliberately. Believe me, child, I have a will of my own."

"Yes," she meditated, "I believe you have a strong will."

"'Tis a swinish business, over-drinking, when all's said and done." He announced it as if he made a discovery; and indeed something of a discovery it was, for that age. "Weakens a man's self-control, besides dulling his palate. . . . They tell me, by the way, that after you left I beat Silk."

Ruth looked grave. "You did wrong, then."

"Silk is a beast."

"An excellent reason for not making him your guest; none for striking him at your own table."

"Perhaps not." Sir Oliver shrugged his shoulders. "Well, he can have his revenge, if he wants it."

"How so? As a clergyman he cannot offer to fight you, and as a coward he would not if he could."

"Is one, then, to be considerate with cowards?"

"Certainly, if you honour cowards with your friendship."

"Friendship! . . . The dog likes his platter and I suffer him for his talk. When his talk trespasses beyond sufferance, I chastise him. That's how I look at it."

"I am sorry, my lord, that Mr. Silk should make the third on your list this morning."

"Oh, come; you don't ask me to *apologise* to Silk!"

"To him rather than to me."

"But—oh nonsense! He was disgusting—unspeakable, I tell you. If you suppose I struck him for nothing——"

"I do not."

"You cannot think what he said."

"Something about me, was it not?" Then, as Sir Oliver stood silent, "Something a great many folk—your guests included—are quite capable of thinking about me, though they have not Mr. Silk's gift of language."

"—That gift for which (you will go on to remind me) I suffer him."

"No; that gift which (you said) trespasses beyond sufferance." She did not remind him that he, after all, had exposed her and provoked Mr. Silk's uncleanly words.

Both were beating time now. He had come, as was meet, to offer an apology, and with no intent beyond.

He found not only that Ruth Josselin was grown a woman surpassing fair, but that her mere presence (it seemed, by no will of hers, but in spite of her will) laid hold of him, commanding him to face that further intent. It was wonderful, and yet just at this moment it mattered little, that the daylight soberly confirmed what had dazzled his drunkenness over night; that her speech added good sense to beauty. . . . What mattered at the moment was a sense of urgency, oppressing and oppressed by an equal sense of helplessness.

He had set the forces working and, with that, had chosen to stand aside—in indolence partly, partly in a careful cutivated indifference, but in part also obeying motives more creditable. He had stood aside, promising the result, but himself dallying with time. And lo! the result had suddenly overtaken him. Had he created a monster, in place of a beautiful woman, he had not been more at its mercy.

But why this sense of urgency? And why should he allow it to oppress him?

Here was a creature exquisite, desirable, educated for no purpose but to be his. Then why not declare himself, leap the last easy fence and in a short while make her his?

To be sure her education—which, as we have seen, owned one source and spring, the passion to make herself perfect for his sake—had fashioned a woman very different to the woman of *his* planning. She had built

not upon his careless defective design but upon her own incessant instinct for the best. So much his last night's blunder had taught him. He had sent for her as for a handmaid; and as a handmaid she had obeyed—but in spirit as a queen.

To put it brutally, she could raise her terms, and he as a gentleman could not beat her down. With ninety-nine women out of a hundred those higher terms could be summed up in one word—marriage. Well and again, why not? He was rich and his own master. In all but her poor origin and the scandal of an undeserved punishment she was worthy—more than worthy; and for the Colonials, among whom alone that scandal would count against her, he had a habit of contempt. He could, and would in his humour, force Boston to court her salons and hold its tongue from all but secret tattle. The thought, too, of Lady Caroline at this moment crossing the high seas to be met with the news agreeably moved him to mirth.

But somehow, face to face here, he divined that Ruth was not as ninety-nine women in the hundred; that her terms were different. They might be less, but also they were more. They might be less. Had she not crossed her arms and told him she was his slave? But in that very humility he read that they were more. There was no last easy fence. There was no fence at all. But a veil there was; a veil he lacked the insight to penetrate, the brutality to tear aside.

Partly to assure himself, partly to tempt her from this mysterious ring of defence, he went on, "I ought to apologise, too, for having sent Silk yesterday with my message. You received it?"

She bent her head.

"My aunt and cousin invite themselves to Boston, and give me no chance to say anything but 'Welcome.' Two pistols held to my head." He laughed. "There's a certain downrightness in Lady Caroline. And what do you suppose she wants?"

"Mr. Silk says she wants you to marry your cousin."

"Told you that, did he?" His eyes were on her face, but it had not changed colour; her clear gaze yet baffled him. "Well, and what do you say?"

"Must I say anything?"

"Well"—he gave a short, impatient laugh—"we can hardly pretend—can we?—that it doesn't concern you."

"I do not pretend it," she answered. "I am yours, to deal with as you will; to dismiss when you choose. I can never owe you anything but gratitude."

"Ruth, will you marry me?"

He said it with the accent of passion, stepping half a pace forward, holding out his hands. She winced and drew back a little; she, too, holding out her hands, but with the palms turned downward. Upon that movement his passion hung fire. (Was it actual passion, or rather a surrender to the inevitable—to a feeling

that it had all happened fatally, beyond escape, that now—beautiful, wonderful as she had grown—he could never do without her? At any rate their hands, outstretched thus, did not meet.)

"You talked lightly just now," she said, and with the smallest catch in her voice, "of vows made in haste. You forget your vow that after three years I should go back—go back whence you took me—and choose."

"No," he corrected. "My promise was that you should go back and announce your choice. If some few months are to run, nothing hinders your choosing here and now. I do not ask you to marry me before the term is out, but only to make up your mind. You hear what I offer."

She swept him a low, obedient bow. "I do, and it is much to me, my dear lord. Oh, believe me, it is very much! . . . But I do not think I want to be your wife—thus."

"You could not love me? Is that what you mean?"

"Not love you?" Her voice, sweet and low, choked on the words. "Not love you?" she managed to repeat. "You, who came to me as a god—to me, a poor tavern drudge—who lifted me from the cart, the scourge; lifted me out of ignorance, out of shame? Lord—love—doubt what you will of me—but not that!"

"You do love me? Then why—" He paused, wondering. The impalpable barrier hung like a mist about his wits.

"Did Andromeda not love Perseus, think you?" she asked lightly, recovering her smile, albeit her eyes were dewy.

"I am dull, then," he confessed. "I certainly do not understand."

"You came to me as a god when you saved me. Shall you come to me as less by an inch when you stoop to love me?"

"Ah!" he said, as if at length he comprehended; "I was drunk last night, and you must have time to get that image out of your mind."

She shook her head slowly. "You did not ask me last night to marry you. I shall always, I think, be able to separate an unworthy image of you, and forget it."

"Then you must mean that I am yet unworthy."

"My dear lord," she said after a moment or two, in which she seemed to consider how best to make it plain to him, "you asked me just now to marry you, but not because you knew me to be worthy; and though you may command what you choose, and I can deny you nothing, I would not willingly be your wife for a smaller reason. Nor did you ask me in the strength of your will, your passion even, but in their weakness. Am I not right?"

He was dumb.

"And is it thus," she went on, "that the great ones love and beget great children?"

"I see," he said at length, and very slowly. "It means that I must very humbly become your wooer."

"It means that, if it be my honour ever to reward you, I would fain it were with the best of me. . . . Send me away from Sabines, my lord, and be in no hurry to choose. Your cousin—what is her name? Oh, I shall not be jealous!"

With a change of tone she led him to talk of the new home he had prepared for her—at a farmstead under Wachusett. He was sending thither two of his gentlest thoroughbreds, that she might learn to ride.

"Books, too, you shall have in plenty," he promised. "But there will be a dearth of tutors, I fear. I could not, for example, very well ask Mr. Hichens to leave his cure of souls and dwell with two maiden ladies in the wilderness."

She laughed. Her eyes sparkled already at the thought of learning to be a horsewoman.

"I will do without tutors." She spread her arms wide, as with a swimmer's motion, and he could not but note the grace of it. The palms, turned outward and slightly downward, had an eloquence, too, which he interpreted.

"I have mewed you here too long. You sigh for liberty."

She nodded, drawing a long breath. "I come from the sea-beach, remember."

"Say but the word, and instead of the mountain, the beach shall be yours."

"No. I have never seen a mountain. It will have the sound of waters, too—of its own cataracts. And on the plain I shall learn to gallop, and feel the wind rushing past me. These things, and a few books, and Tatty—" Here she broke off, on a sudden thought. "My lord, there is a question I have put to myself many times, and have promised myself to put to you. Why does Tatty never talk to me about God and religion and such things?"

He did not answer at once.

She went on: "It cannot only be because you do not believe in them. For Tatty is very religious, and brave as a lion; she would never be silent against her conscience."

"How do you know that I don't believe in them?"

She laughed. "Does my lord truly suppose me so dull of wit? or will he fence with my question instead of answering it?"

"The truth is, then," he confessed, "that before she saw you I thought fit to tell Miss Quiney what you had suffered——"

"She has known it from the first? I wondered sometimes. But oh, the dear deceit of her!"

"—And seeing that this same religion had caused your sufferings, I asked her to deal gently with you. She would not promise more than to wait and choose her

own time. But Tatty, as you call her, is an honourable woman."

Ruth stretched out her hands.

"Ah, you were good—you were good! . . . If only my heart were a glass, and you might see how goodness becomes you!"

He took her hands this time, and laying one over another, kissed the back of the uppermost, but yet so respectfully that Miss Quiney, entering the room just then, supposed him to be merely taking a ceremonious leave.

For a few minutes he lingered out his call, hat and walking-cane in hand, talking pleasantly of his last night's guests, and with a smile that assumed his pardon to be granted. Incidentally Ruth learned how it had happened that a chair stood empty for her by Mr. Langton's side. It appeared that Governor Shirley himself had called, earlier in the evening, to offer his felicitations; and finding the seat on Sir Oliver's right occupied by a toper who either would not or could not make room, he had with some tact taken a chair at the far end of the table and *vis-à-vis* with his host, protesting that he chose it as the better vantage-ground for delivering a small speech. His speech, too, had been neat, happy in phrase, and not devoid of good feeling. Having delivered it, he had slipped away early, on an excuse of official business.

Sir Oliver related this appreciatively; and it had, in fact, been one of those small courtesies which, among men of English stock, give a grace to public life and help to keep the fighting clean. But in fact also (Ruth gathered) the two men did not love one another. Shirley —able and *rusé* lawyer—had some sense of colonial independence, colonial ambition, colonial self-respect. Sir Oliver had none; he was a Whig patrician, and the colonies existed for the use and patronage of England. More than a year before, when Massachusetts raised a militia and went forth to capture Louisbourg—which it did, to the astonishment of the world—the Governor, whose heart was set on the expedition, had approached Captain Vyell and privately begged him to command it. He was answered that, having once borne the King's commission, Captain Vyell did not find a colonial uniform to his taste.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCERNING MARGARET

He called again, next morning. He came on horseback, followed by a groom. The groom led a light chestnut mare, delicate of step as a dancer, and carrying a side-saddle.

Ruth's ear had caught the sound of hoofs. She looked forth at her open window as Sir Oliver reined up and hailed, frank as a schoolboy.

"Your first riding lesson!" he announced.

"But I have no riding-skirt," she objected, her eyes opening wide with delight as they looked down and scanned the mare.

"You shall have one to-morrow." He swung himself out of the saddle and gave over his own horse to the groom. "To-day you have only to learn how to sit and hold the reins and ride at a walk."

She caught up a hat and ran downstairs, blithe as a girl should be blithe.

He taught her to set her foot in his hand and lifted her into place.

"But are you not riding also?" she asked as he took the leading-rein.

"No: I shall walk beside you to-day. . . . Now take up the reins—so; in both hands, please. That will help you to sit square and keep the right shoulder back, which with a woman is half the secret of a good seat. Where a man uses grip, she uses balance. . . . For the same reason you must not draw the feet back; it throws your body forward and off its true poise on the hips."

She began to learn at once and intelligently; for, unlike her other tutors, he started with simple principles and taught her nothing without giving its reason. He led her twice around the open gravelled space before the house, and so aside and along a grassy pathway that curved between the elms to the right. The pathway was broad and allowed him to walk somewhat wide of the mare, yet not so wide as to tauten the leading-rein, which he held (as she learned afterwards) merely to give her confidence; for the mare was docile and would follow him at a word.

"I am telling you the why-and-how of it all," he said, "because after this week you will be teaching yourself. This week I shall come every morning for an hour; but on Wednesday you start for Sweetwater Farm."

"And will there be nobody at the Farm to help me?" she asked, a trifle dismayed.

"The farmer—his name is Cordery—rides, after a fashion. But he knows nothing of a side-saddle, if indeed he has ever seen one."

"Then to trot, canter, and gallop I must teach myself," she thought; for among the close plantations of Sabines there was room for neither. "If I experiment here, they will find me hanging like Absalom from a bough." But aloud she said nothing of her tremors.

"Dicky sits a horse remarkably well for his age," said Sir Oliver after a pause. "I had some thought to pack him off holidaying with you. But the puppy has taken to the water like a spaniel. He went off to the *Venus* yesterday, and it seems that on board of her he struck up, there and then, a close friendship with Harry's lieutenant, a Mr. Hanmer; and now he can talk of nothing but rigging and running-gear. He's crazed for a cruise and a hammock. Also it would seem that he used his time to win the affections of Madam Harry; which argues that his true calling is not the Navy, after all, but diplomacy."

Ruth sighed inaudibly. Dicky's companionship would have been delightful. But she knew the child's craze, and would not claim him, to mar his bliss—though she well knew that at a word from her he would renounce it.

"Diplomacy?" she echoed.

"Well," said Sir Oliver, looking straight before him. "Sally—my brother insists on calling her Sally—

appears to have her head fixed well on her shoulders: she looks—as you must not forget to look—straight between the horse's ears. But your young bride is apt to be the greatest prude in the world. And Dicky, you see——"

Her hand weighed on the rein and brought the mare to a halt.

"Tell me about Dicky?"

"About Dicky?" he repeated.

"About his mother, then."

"She is dead," he answered, staring at the mare's glossy shoulder and smoothing it. His brows were bent in a frown.

"Yes . . . he told me that, in the coach, on our way from Port Nassau. It was the first thing he told me when he awoke. We had been rolling along the beach for hours in the dark; and I remember how, almost at the end of the beach, it grew light inside the coach and he opened his eyes. . . ."

She did not relate that the child had awaked in her arms.

"It was the first thing Dicky told me," she repeated; "and the only thing about—her. I think it must be the only thing he knows about her."

"Probably; for she died when he was born and—well, as the child grew up, it was not easy to explain to him. Other folks, no doubt—the servants and such-like—were either afraid to tell or left it to me as my

business. And I am an indolent parent." He paused and added, "To be quite honest, I daresay I distasted the job and shirked it."

"You did wrongly then," murmured Ruth, and her eyes were moist. "Dicky started with a great hole in his life, and you left in unfilled. Often, being lonely, he must have needed to know something of his mother. You should have told him all that was good; and that was not little, I think, if you had loved her?"

"I loved her to folly," he answered at length, his eyes still fixed on the mare's shoulder; "and yet not to folly, for she was a good woman: a married woman, some three or four years older than I and close upon twenty years younger than her husband, who was major of my regiment."

"You ran away with her? . . . Say that he was not your friend."

"He was not; and you may put it more correctly that I helped her to run away from him. He was a drunkard, and in private he ill-used her disgustingly. . . . Having helped her to escape I offered him his satisfaction. He refused to divorce her; but we fought and I ran him through the arm to avoid running him through the body, for he was a shockingly bad swordsman."

Ruth frowned. "You could not marry her?"

"No, and to kill him was no remedy; for if I could not marry an undivorced woman, as little could she

have married her husband's murderer." He hunched his shoulders and concluded, "The dilemma is not unusual."

"What happened, then?"

"My mother paid twenty calls upon the Duke of Newcastle, and after the twentieth I received the Collectorship of this port of Boston. It was exile, but lucrative exile. My good mother is a Whig and devout; and there is nothing like that combination for making the best of both worlds. Indeed you may say that at this point she added the New World, and made the best of all three. She assured me that its solitudes would offer, among other advantages, great opportunity for repentance. "Of course," she said, "if you must take the woman, you must."

He ended with a short laugh. Ruth did not laugh. Her mind was masculine at many points, but like a true woman she detested ironical speech.

"That is Mr. Langton's way of talking," she said; "and you are using it to hide your feelings. Will you tell me her name?—her Christian name only?"

"She was called Margaret—Margaret Dance. There is no reason why you should not have it in full."

"Is there a portrait of her?"

"Yes; as a girl she sat to Kneller—a Dryad leaning against an oak. The picture hangs in my dressing-room."

"It should have hung, rather, in Dicky's nursery;

which," she added, using the weapon she most disliked, "need not have debarred your seeing it from time to time."

He glanced up, for he had never before heard her speak thus sharply.

"Perhaps you are right," he agreed; "though, for me, I let the dead bury the dead. I have no belief, remember, in any life beyond this one. Margaret is gone, and I see not how, being dead, she can advantage me or Dicky."

His words angered Ruth and at the same time subtly pleased her; and on second thoughts angered her the more for having pleased. She thought scorn of herself for her momentary jealousy of the dead; scorn for having felt relief at his careless tone; and some scorn to be soothed by a doctrine that, in her heart, she knew to be false.

For the moment her passions were like clouds in thunder weather, mounting against the wind; and in the small tumult of them she let jealousy dart its last lightning tongue.

"I am not learned in these matters, my lord. But I have heard that man must make a deity of something. The worse sort of unbeliever, they say, lives in the present and burns incense to himself. The better sort, having no future to believe in, idolizes his past."

"Margaret is dead," he repeated. "I am no sentimentalist."

She bent her head. To herself she whispered. "He may not idolize his past, yet he cannot escape from it." . . . And her thoughts might have travelled farther, but she had put the mare to a walk again and just then her ears caught an unaccustomed sound, or confusion of sounds.

At the end of the alley she reined up, wide-eyed.

A narrow gateway here gave access to what had yesterday been a sloping paddock where Miss Quiney grazed a couple of cows. To-day the cows had vanished and given way to a small army of labourers. Broad strips of turf had vanished also and the brown loam was moving downhill in scores of wheel-barrows, to build up the slope to a level.

Sir Oliver marked her amazement and answered it with an easy laugh.

"The time is short, you see, and already we have wasted half an hour of it unprofitably. . . . These fellows appear to be working well."

She gazed at the moving gangs as one, having come by surprise upon a hive of bees, stands still and cons the small creatures at work.

"But what is the meaning of it?"

"The meaning? Why that for this week I am your riding-master, and that by to-morrow you will have a passable riding-school."

CHAPTER IX

THE PROSPECT

THIS happened on a Thursday. On the following Wednesday, a while before daybreak, he met her on horseback by the gate of Sabines, and they rode forth side by side, ahead of the coach wherein Miss Quiney sat piled about with baggage, clutching in one hand a copy of Baxter's *Saint's Everlasting Rest* and with the other the ring of a canary-cage. (It was Dicky's canary, and his first love-offering.) Yesterday had been Ruth's birthday—her eighteenth—and under conduct of Manasseh he had visited Sabines to wish her "many happy returns" and to say good-bye.

Sir Oliver would escort the travellers for twelve miles on their way, to a point where the inland road broke into cart-tracks, and the tracks diverged across a country newly disafforested and strewn with jagged stumps among which the heavy vehicle could by no means be hauled. Here Farmer Cordery was to be in waiting with his tilt-covered wagon.

They had started thus early because the season was hot and they desired to traverse the open highway and

the clearings and to reach the forest before the sun's rays grew ardent. Once past the elms of Sabines their road lay broad before them, easy to discern; for the moon, well in her third quarter, rode high, with no trace of cloud or mist. So clear she shone that in imagination one could reach up and run a finger along her hard bright edge; and under moon and stars a land-breeze, virginally cool, played on our two riders' cheeks. Ungloving and stretching forth a hand, Ruth felt the dew falling, as it had been falling ever since sundown; and under that quiet lustration the world at her feet and around her, unseen as yet, had been renewed, the bee-ravished flowers replaced with blossoms ready to unfold, the turf revived, reclothed in young green, the atmosphere bathed, cleansed of exhausted scents, made ready for morning's "bridal of the earth and sky":—

"As a vesture shall he fold them up. . . . In them hath he set a tabernacle for the sun; which cometh forth as a bridegroom out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a giant to run his course."

Darkling they rode, and in silence, as though by consent. Ruth had never travelled this highway before: it glimmered across a country of which she knew nothing and could see nothing. But no shadow of fear crossed her spirit. Her heart was hushed; yet it exulted, because her lord rode beside her.

They had ridden thus without speech for three or

four miles, when her chestnut blundered, tripped, and was almost down.

"All right?" he asked, as she reined up and steadied the mare.

"Yes. . . . She gave me a small fright, though."

"What happened? It looked to me as if she came precious near crossing her feet. If she repeats that trick by daylight I'll cast her—as I would to-morrow, if I were sure."

"Is it so bad a trick?"

"It might break your neck. It would certainly bring her down and break her knees."

"Oh!" Ruth shivered. "Do you mean that it would actually break them?" she asked in her ignorance.

He laughed. "Well, that's possible; but I meant the skin of the knee."

"That would heal, surely?"

He laughed again. "A horse is like a woman—" he began, but checked himself of a sudden. She waited for him to continue, and he went on, "It knocks everything off the price, you see. Some won't own a horse that has once been down; and any knowledgeable man can tell, at a glance. It is the first thing he looks for."

She considered for a moment. "But if the mark had been a scratch only—and the scratch had healed —might she not be as good a horse as ever?"

"It would damage her price, none the less."

"But you are not a horse-dealer. Would *you* value a horse by its selling price?"

He laughed. "I am afraid," he owned, "that I should be ruled by other men's opinions. Your connoisseur does not collect chipped chinaware. . . . There's the chance, too, that the mare, having once fallen, will throw herself again by the same trick."

"And women are like horses," thought Ruth as they rode on. The night was paling about them, and she watched the rolling champaign as little by little it took shape, emerging from the morning mist and passing from monochrome into faint colours: for albeit the upper sky was clear as ever, mist filled the hollows of the hills and rolled up their sides like a smoke.

"Look!" commanded Sir Oliver, reining up and turning in his saddle.

He pointed with his horse-whip. Behind them, over a tree-clad hill, lay a long purple cloud; and above it, while he pointed, the sun thrust its edge as it were the rim of a golden paten. Ruth wheeled her mare about, to face the spectacle, and at that moment the cloud parted horizontally as though a hand had ripped the veil across. A flood of gold poured the rent, dazzling her eyes.

The sun mounted and swam free: the upper portion of the veil floated off like a wisp and drifted down the wind. Where the glory had shone, it lingered through tint after tint—rose, pale lemon, palest sea-green—and

so passed into azure and became one with the rest of the heavens.

Sir Oliver withdrew his eyes and sought hers. "When I find the need of faith," he said, "I shall turn sun-worshipper."

"You have never found that need?" she asked slowly.

"Never," he confessed. "And you?"

"Never as a need. I mean," she explained, "that though I always despised religion—yes, always, even before I came to hate it—I never doubted that some wisdom must be at watch and at work all around me, ordering the sun and stars, for instance, and separating right from wrong. I just cannot understand how any one can do without a faith of that sort: it's as necessary as breath."

He shrugged his shoulders. "To me one Jehova's as good as another, as unnecessary, and as incredible. I find it easier to believe that chaos hurtled around until it struck out some working balance; that the stars learned their places pretty much as men and women are learning theirs to-day. A painful process, I'll grant you, and damnably tedious; but they came to it in the end, and so in the end, maybe, will poor imitative man. But," he broke off, "this faith of yours must have failed you, once."

She shivered. "No; I made no claim on it, you see. Perhaps"—with a little smile—"I did not think

myself important enough. I only know that, whatever was right, those men were horribly wrong: for it *must* be wrong to be cruel. Then I woke up, and you were beside me——"

She would have added, "How could I doubt, then?" But her voice failed her, and she wheeled about that he might not see her tears.

He, too, turned his horse. They rode on for a few paces in silence.

"I wish," she said, recovering her voice—"I wish, for your sake, you could have felt what I have been feeling since we left Sabines; the *goodness* all about us, watching us out of the night and the stars."

She looked up; but the stars were gone, faded out into daylight. He pushed his horse half a pace ahead, and glanced sideways at her face. Tears shone yet in her eyes, and his own, as he quickly averted them, fell on a tall mullein growing by the roadside. Big drops of dew adhered upon its woolly leaves and twinkled in the sunshine; and by contrast he knew the colour of her eyes—that they were violet and of the night—their dew distilled out of such violet darkness as had been the quality of one or two Mediterranean nights that lingered among his memories of the Grand Tour. More and more this girl surprised him with graces foreign to this colonial soil, graces supposed by him to be classical and lost, the appanage of goddesses.

Like a goddess now she lifted an arm and pointed

west, as he had pointed east. Ahead of them, to the right of the road, rose a tall hill, wooded at the base, broken at the summit by craggy terraces. Two large birds wheeled and hovered above it, high in the blue, fronting the sunlight.

"Eagles, by Jove!" cried Sir Oliver.

Ruth drew a breath and watched them. She had never before seen an eagle.

"Will they have their nest in the cliffs?" she asked.

"Perhaps. . . . No, more likely they come from Wachusett; more likely still, from the mountains beyond. They are here seeking food."

"They do not appear to be seeking food," she said after a pause during which she watched their ambits of flight circling and intersecting. "See the nearest one mounting, and the other lifting on a wider curve to meet him above. One would say they followed some pattern, like folks dancing."

"Some act of homage to the sun," he suggested. "They have come down to the sea to meet him—they look over the Atlantic from aloft there—and perform in his honour. Who knows?"

Across Ruth's inner vision there flashed a memory of Mr. Hichens, black-suited and bald, bending over his Hebrew Bible and expounding a passage of Job: "*Doth the eagle mount up at thy command, and make her nest on high? She dwelleth and abideth on the rock, upon the crag of the rock, and the strong place. . . .*"

To herself she said: "If it be so, the eagle's faith is mine; my lord's also, perchance, if he but knew it."

Aloud she asked, "Why are the noblest, birds and beasts, so few and solitary?"

Sir Oliver laughed. "You may include man. The answer is the same, and simple—the strong of the earth feed on the weak, and it takes all the weaklings to make blood for the few."

She mused; but when she spoke again it was not to dispute with him. "You say they look over the sea from aloft there. Might we have sight of it from the top of the hill?"

"Perhaps. There is plenty of time to make sure before the coach overtakes us—though I warn you it will be risky."

"I am not afraid."

They cantered off gaily, plunged into the woods and breasted the slope, Sir Oliver leading and threading his way through the undergrowth. By-and-by they came to the bed of a torrent and followed it up, the horses picking their steps upon the flat boulders between which the water trickled. Some of these boulders were slimed and slippery, and twice Sir Oliver reached out a hand and hauled the mare firmly on to her quarters.

The belt of crags did not run completely around the hill. At the back of it, after a scramble out of the gully, they came on a slope of good turf, and so cantered easily to the summit.

Ruth gave a little cry of delight, and followed it up with a yet smaller one of disappointment. The country lay spread at her feet like a vast amphitheatre, ringed with wooded hills. Across the plain they encircled a river ran in loops, and from the crag at the edge of which she stood a streamlet emerged and took a brave leap down the hill to join it.

"But where is the sea?"

"That small hill yonder must hide it. You see it, with its line of elms? If those trees were down, we should see the Atlantic for a certainty. If you like the spot otherwise, I will have them removed."

He said it seriously; but of course she took it for granted that he spoke in jest, albeit the jest puzzled her a little. Indeed when she glanced up at him he was smiling, with his eyes on the distant landscape.

"The mountain too," he added, "if the trees will not suffice. Though not by faith, it shall be removed."

CHAPTER X

THREE LADIES

"You may smoke," said Dicky politely, setting down his glass.

"Thank you," answered Mr. Hanmer. "But are you sure? In my experience of houses there's always some one that objects."

Dicky lifted his chin. "We call this the nursery because it has always been the nursery. But I do what I like here."

Mr. Hanmer had accepted the boy's invitation to pay him a visit ashore and help him to rig a model cutter—a birthday gift from his father; and the pair had spent an afternoon upon it, seated upon the floor with the toy between them and a litter of twine everywhere, Dicky deep in the mysteries of knots and splices, the lieutenant whittling out miniature blocks and belaying-pins with a knife that seemed capable of anything.

They had been interrupted by Manasseh, bearing a tray of refreshments—bread and honey and cakes, with a jug of milk for the one; for the other a decanter of brown sherry with a dish of ratafia biscuits. The

repast was finished now, and Dicky, eager to fall to work again, feared that his friend might make an excuse for departing.

Mr. Hanmer put a hand in his pocket and drew out his pipe.

"Your father would call it setting a bad example, I doubt?"

To this the boy, had he been less loyal, might have answered that his father took no great stock in examples, bad or good. He said: "Papa smokes. He says it is cleaner than taking snuff; and so it is, if you have ever seen Mr. Silk's waistcoat."

So Mr. Hanmer filled and lit his pipe, doing wonders with a pocket tinder-box. Dicky watched the process gravely through every detail, laying up hints for manhood.

"I ought to have asked you before," he said. "Nobody comes here ever, except Mr. Silk and the servants."

Hapless speech and bootless boast! They had scarcely seated themselves to work again, the lieutenant puffing vigorously, before they heard footsteps in the corridor, with a rustle of silks, and a hand tapped on the door.

It opened as Dicky jumped to his feet, calling "Come in!"—and on the threshold appeared Mrs. Vyell, in walking dress. Dicky liked "Mrs. Harry," as he called her; but he stared in dismay at two magnificent

ladies in the doorway behind her, and more especially at the elder of the twain, who, attired in puce-coloured silk, stiff as a board, walked in lifting a high patrician nose and exclaiming,—

"Fah! What a detestable odour!"

Mr. Hanmer hurriedly hid his pipe and scrambled up, stammering an apology. Dicky showed more self-possession. He gave a little bow to the two strangers and turned to Mrs. Harry.

"I am sorry, Aunt Sarah. But I didn't know, of course, that you were coming and bringing visitors."

"To be sure you did not, child," said Mrs. Harry with a good-natured smile. She was a cheerful, commonsensical person, pleasant of face rather than pretty, by no means wanting in wit, and radiant of happiness, just now, as a young woman should be who has married the man of her heart. "But let me present you—to Lady Caroline Vyell and Miss Diana."

Dicky bowed again. "I am sorry, ma'am," he repeated, addressing Lady Caroline. "Mr. Hanmer has put out his pipe, you see, and the window is open."

Lady Caroline carried an eyeglass with a long handle of tortoise-shell. Through it she treated Dicky to a long and disconcerting scrutiny, and lowered it to turn and ask Mrs. Harry,—

"You permit him to call you 'Aunt Sarah'?"

Mrs. Harry laughed. "It sounds better, you will admit, than 'Aunt Sally,' and don't necessitate my

carrying a pipe in my mouth. Oh yes," she added, with a glance at the boy's flushed face, "Dicky and I are great friends. In any one's presence but Mr. Hanmer's I would say 'the best of friends.' "

Lady Caroline turned her eyeglass upon Mr. Hanmer. "Is this—er—gentleman his tutor?" she asked.

The question, and the sight of the lieutenant's mental distress, set Mrs. Harry laughing again. "In seamanship only. Mr. Hanmer is my husband's second-in-command and one of the best officers in the Navy."

"I consider smoking a filthy habit," said Lady Caroline.

"Yes, ma'am," murmured Mr. Hanmer.

The odious eyeglass was turned upon Dicky again. He, to avoid it, glanced aside at Miss Diana. He found Miss Diana less unpleasant than her mother, but attractive only by contrast. She was a tall woman, handsome but somewhat haggard, with a face saved indeed from peevishness by its air of distinction, but scornful and discontented. She had been riding, and her long, close habit became her well, as did her wide-brimmed hat, severely trimmed with a bow of black ribbon and a single ostrich feather.

"Diana," said Lady Caroline, but without removing her stony stare, "the child favours his mother."

"Indeed!" the girl answered indifferently. "I never met her."

"Oliver has her portrait somewhere, I believe. We

must get him to show it to us. A toast in her day, and quite notably good-looking—though after a style I abominate." She turned to Mrs. Harry and explained: "One of your helpless clinging women. In my experience that sort does incomparably the worst mischief."

"Oh, hush, please!" murmured Mrs. Harry.

But Lady Caroline came of a family addicted to speaking its thoughts aloud. "Going to sea, is he? Well, on the whole Oliver couldn't do better. The boy's position here must be undesirable in many ways; and at sea a lad stands on his own feet—eh, Mr.—— I did not catch your name?"

"Hanmer, ma'am."

"Well, and isn't it so?"

"Not altogether, ma'am," stammered Mr. Hanmer. "If ever your ladyship had been in the Navy——"

"God bless the man!" Lady Caroline interjected.

"—you'd have found that—that a good deal of kissing goes by favour, ma'am."

"H'mph!" said Lady Caroline when Mrs. Harry had done laughing. "The child will not lack protection, of course. Whether 'tis to their credit or not I won't say, but the Vyells have always shown a conscience for—er—obligations of this kind."

On her way back to Sabines, where Sir Oliver had installed them, Lady Caroline again commended to her daughter his sound sense in packing the child off to sea.

"They will take 'em at any age, I understand; and Mrs. Vyell, it appears, has no objection."

"She is not returning to Carolina by sea."

"No; but she can influence her husband. I must have another talk with her . . . a pleasant, unaffected creature, and, for a sailor's wife, more than presentable. One had hardly indeed looked to find such natural good manners in this part of the world. Her mother was a Quakeress, she tells me: yet she laughs a good deal, which I had imagined to be against their principles. She doesn't say 'thee' and 'thou' either."

"I heard her *tutoyer* her husband."

"Indeed? . . . Well," Lady Caroline went on somewhat inconsequently, "Harry is a lucky man. When one thinks of the dreadful connections these sailors are only too apt to form—though one cannot wholly blame them, their opportunities being what they are . . . But, as I was saying, Oliver couldn't have done better, for himself or for the child. At home the poor little creature could never be but a question; and since he has this craze for salt water—curious he should resemble his uncle in this rather than his father—one may almost call it providential. . . . At the same time, my dear, I wish you could have shown a little more interest."

"In the child? Why?"

"Really, Diana, I wish you would cure yourself of putting these abrupt questions. . . . Your Cousin

Oliver is now the head of the family, remember. He has received us with uncommon cordiality, and put himself out not a little——"

"I can believe *that*," said Diana brusquely.

"And it says much. All men are selfish, and Oliver as a youth was very far from being an exception. I find the change in him significant of much. . . . At the same time you have mixed enough in the world, dear, to know that young men will be young men, and this sort of thing happens, unfortunately."

"If, mamma, you suppose I bear Cousin Oliver any grudge because of this child——"

"I am heartily glad to hear you say it. There should be, with us women, a Christian nicety in dealing with these—er—situations; in retrospect, at all events. A certain—disgust, shall we say?—is natural, proper, even due to our sex: I should think the worse—very far the worse—of my Diana did she not feel it. But above all things, charity! . . . And let me tell you, dear, what I could not have told at the time, but I think you are now old enough to know that such an experience is often the best cure for a man, who thereafter, should he be fortunate in finding the right woman, anchors his affections and proves the most assiduous of husbands. This may sound paradoxical to you——"

"Dear mamma"—Diana hid a smile and a little yawn together—"believe me it does not."

"Such a man, then," pursued Lady Caroline, faintly

surprised, "is likely to be the more appreciative of any kindness shown to—er—what I may call the living consequence of his error."

"Why not say 'Dicky' at once, mamma, and have done with it."

"—To Dicky, then, if you will; but I was attempting to lay down the general rule which Dicky illustrates. A little gentle notice taken of the child not only appeals to the man as womanly in itself, but delicately conveys to him that the past is, to some extent, condoned. He has sown his wild oats: he is, so to speak, *rangé;* but he is none the less grateful for some assurance——"

Lady Caroline's discourse had whiled the way back to Sabines, to the drawing-room; and here Diana wheeled round on her with the question, sudden and straight,—

"Do you suppose that Cousin Oliver is *rangé*, as you call it?"

"My child, we have every reason to believe so."

"Then what do you make of this?" The girl took up a small volume that lay on the top of the harpsichord, and thrust it into her mother's hands.

"Eh? What?" Lady Caroline turned the book back uppermost and spelled out the title through her eyeglass. "'Ovid'—he's Latin, is he not? Dear, I had no notion that you kept up your studies in that—er—tongue."

"I do not. I have forgot what little I learned of it, and that was next to nothing. But open the book, please, at the title-page."

"I see nothing. It has neither book-plate nor owner's signature." (Indeed Ruth never wrote her name in her books. She looked upon them as her lord's, and hers only in trust.)

"The title-page, I said. You are staring at the fly-leaf."

"Ah, to be sure—" Lady Caroline turned a leaf. "Is this what you mean?" She held up a loose sheet of paper covered with writing.

"Read it."

The elder lady found the range of her eyeglass and conned—in silence and without well grasping its purport—the following effusion:—

Other maids make Love a foeman,
  Lie in ambush to defeat him;
  I alone will step to meet him
Valiant, his accepted woman.
    Equal, consort in his car,
    Ride I to his royal war.

  Victims of his bow and targe,
Yet who toyed with lovers' quarrels,
Envy me my braver laurels!
  Lord! thy shield of shadow large
  Lift above me, shout the charge!

"Well?"

"I make nothing of it," owned Lady Caroline. "It appears to be poetry of a sort—probably some translation from the Latin author."

"You note, at least, that the handwriting is a woman's?"

"H'm, yes," Lady Caroline agreed.

"Nothing else?"

"Dear, you speak in riddles."

"It *is* a riddle," said Diana. "Take the first letter of each line, and read them down, in order."

"O, L, I, V, E, R V, Y, E, L, L," spelled Lady Caroline, and lowered her eyeglass. "My dear, as you say, this cannot be a mere coincidence."

"*Did* I say that?" asked Diana.

"But who can it be, or have been? . . . That Dance woman, perhaps? She was infatuated enough."

'It was not she," said Diana positively.

"*Somebody* can tell us. . . . That Mr. Silk, for instance."

"Ah, you think of him too?"

"As a clergyman—and to some extent a boon companion of Oliver's—he would be likely to know——"

"—And to tell? You are quite right, mamma: I have asked him."

CHAPTER XI

THE ESPIAL

RUTH JOSSELIN came down from the mountain to the stream-side, where, by a hickory bush under a knoll, her mare Madcap stood at tether. Slipping behind the bush—though no living soul was near to spy on her—she slid off her short skirt and indued a longer one more suitable for riding; rolled the discarded garment into a bundle which she strapped behind the saddle; untethered the mare, and mounted.

At her feet the plain stretched for miles, carpeted for the most part with short sweet turf and dotted in the distance with cattle, red in the sunlight that overlooked the mountain's shoulder. These were Farmer Cordery's cattle, and they browsed within easy radius of a clump of elms clustered about Sweetwater Farm. Some four miles beyond, on the far edge of the plain, a very similar clump of elms hid another farm, Natchett by name, in like manner outposted with cattle; and these were the only habitations of men within the ring of the horizon.

The afternoon sun cast the shadow of the mountain

far across this plain, almost to the confines of Sweetwater homestead. A breeze descended from the heights and played with Ruth's curls as she rested in the saddle for a moment, scanning the prospect; a gentle breeze, easily out-galloped. Time, place, and the horse—all promised a perfect gallop; her own spirits, too. For she had spent the day's hot hours in clambering among the cliffs, battling with certain craggy doubts in her own mind; and with the afternoon shadow had come peace at heart; and out of peace a certain careless, not reckless, exaltation. She would test the mare's speed and enjoy this hour before returning to Tatty's conversation, the evening lamp, and the office of family prayer with which Farmer Cordery duly dismissed his household for the night.

She pricked Madcap down the slope, and at the foot of it launched her on the gallop. Surely, unless it be that of sailing on a reach and in a boat that fairly heels to the breeze, there is no such motion to catch the soul on high. The breeze met the wind of her flight and was beaten by it, but still she carried the moment of encounter with her as a wave on the crest of which she rode. It swept, lifted, rapt her out of herself—yet in no bodiless ecstasy; for her blood pulsed in the beat of the mare's hoofs. To surrender to it was luxury, yet her hand on the rein held her own will ready at call; and twice, where Sweetwater brook meandered, she braced herself for the water-jump, judging the pace

and the stride; and twice, with many feet to spare, Madcap sailed over the silver-grey riband.

All the while, ahead of her, the mountain lengthened its shadow. She overtook and passed it a couple of furlongs short of the homestead; passed it—so clearly defined it lay across the pasture—with a firmer hold on the rein, as though clearing an actual obstacle. . . . She was in sunlight now. Before her a wooden fence protected the elms and their enclosure. At the gate of it by rule she should have drawn rein.

She had never leapt a gate; had attempted a bank now and then, but nothing serious. Her success at the water-jumps tempted her; and the mare, galloping with her second wind, seemed to feel the temptation every whit as strongly.

In the instant of rising to it Ruth wondered what Farmer Cordery would say if she broke his top bar. . . . The mare's feet touched it lightly—rap, rap. She was over.

A wood pile stood within the gate to the left, hiding the house. She had passed the corner of it before she could bring Madcap to a standstill, and was laughing to herself in triumph as she glanced around.

Heavens!

The house was of timber, with a deep timbered verandah; and in the verandah, not twenty paces away, beside a table laid for coffee, stood Tatty with

three ladies about her—three ladies all elegantly dressed and staring.

Ruth's hand went up quickly, involuntarily, to her dishevelled hair; and at the same moment the little lady, as though making a bolt from captivity, stepped down from the verandah and came shuffling across the yard towards her, almost at a run.

"Ruth, dear!" she panted. "Oh, dear, dear! I am so glad you have come!"

"Why, what's the matter?" The girl, scenting danger, faced it. She swung herself down from the saddle-crutch, picked up her skirt, and taking Madcap's rein close beside the curb, walked slowly up to the verandah. "Have they been bullying you, dear?" she asked in a low quiet voice.

"They have come all this way to see us—Lady Caroline Vyell, and Miss Diana; yes, and Mrs. Captain Vyell—'Mrs. Harry,' as Dicky calls her. They have ferreted us out, somehow—and the questions they have been asking! I think, dear—I really think—that in your place I should walk Madcap round to her stable and run indoors for a tidy-up before facing them. A minute or two to prepare yourself—I can easily make your excuses."

"And a moment since you were calling me to come and deliver you!" answered Ruth, still advancing. "Present me, please."

Little Miss Quiney, turning and running ahead,

stammered some words to Lady Caroline, who paid no heed to them or to her but kept her eyeglass lifted and fixed upon Ruth. Miss Diana stood a pace behind her mother's shoulder; Mrs. Harry, after a glance at the girl, turned and made pretence to busy herself with the coffee-table.

"So *you* are the young woman!" ejaculated Lady Caroline.

"Am I?" said Ruth quietly, and after a profound curtsy turned sideways to the mare. "A lump of sugar, Tatty, if you please. . . . I thank you, ma'am—" as Mrs. Harry, anticipating Miss Quiney, stepped forward with a piece held between the sugar-tongs. "And I think she even deserves a second, for clearing the yard gate."

She fed the gentle creature and dismissed her. "Now trot around to your stall and ask one of the boys to unsaddle you!" She stood for ten seconds, may be, watching as the mare with a fling of the head trotted off obediently. Then she turned again and met Mrs. Harry's eyes with a frank smile.

"It is the truth," she said. "We cleared the gate. Come, please, and admire——"

Mrs. Harry, in spite of herself, stepped down from the verandah and followed. The others stood as they were, planted in stiff disapproval.

The girl led Mrs. Harry to the corner of the wood pile. "Admire!" she repeated, pointing with her rid-

ing-switch; and then, still keeping the gesture, she sank her voice and asked quickly, "Why are you here? You have a good face, not like the others. Tell me."

"Lady Caroline—" stammered Mrs. Harry, taken at unawares. "She has a right, naturally, to concern herself——"

"Does *he* know?"

"Sir Oliver? No—I believe not. . . . You see, the Vyells are a great family, and 'family' to them is a tremendous affair—a religion almost. Whatever touches one touches all; especially when that one happens to be the head of his house."

"Is that how Captain Vyell—how your husband—feels it?—No, please keep looking towards the gate. I mean no harm by these questions, and you will not mind answering them, I hope? It gives me just a little more chance of fair play."

"To tell you the truth," said Mrs. Harry, pretending to study the jump, "I looked at you because I could not help it. You are an extraordinarily beautiful woman."

"Thank you," answered Ruth. "But about Captain Vyell? I suppose he, as next of kin, is most concerned of all?"

"He did not tell me about you, if that is what you mean; or rather he told me nothing until I questioned him. Then he owned that there was such a person, and that he had seen you. But he does not even know

of this visit; he imagines that Lady Caroline is taking me for a pleasure trip, just to view the country."

Ruth turned towards the house. "You will tell him, of course," she said gravely, "when you return to the ship."

"I—I suppose I shall," confessed Mrs. Harry, and added, "There's one thing. You may suppose that, as his wife, I am as much concerned as any—perhaps more than these others. But I don't want you to think that I suggested hunting you up."

"I do not think anything of the sort. In fact I am sure you did not."

"Thank you."

Ruth had a mind to ask "Who, then, had brought them?" but refrained. She had guessed, and pretty surely.

"Well," she said with half a laugh, "you have been good and given me time to recover. It's heavy odds, you see, and—and I have not been trained for it, exactly. But I feel better. Shall we go back and face them?"

"One moment, again!" Mrs. Harry's kindly face hung out signals of distress. "It's heavy odds, as you say. Everything's against you. But the Lord knows I'm a well-meaning woman, and I'd hate to be unjust. If only I could be sure—if only you would tell me——"

Ruth stood still and faced her.

"Look in my eyes."

Mrs. Harry looked and was convinced. "But you love him," she murmured, "and he——"

"Ah, ma'am, said Ruth, "I answer you one question, and you ask me another!"

CHAPTER XII

LADY CAROLINE

She walked back to the verandah.

"I understand," she said, "that Lady Caroline wishes a word with me."

With a slight bow she led the way through a low window that opened upon the Corderys' best parlour, through that apartment, and across a passage to the door of a smaller room lined with shelves—formerly a stillroom or store-chamber for home-made wines, cordials, preserves, but now converted into a boudoir for her use. Its one window looked out upon the farmyard, now in shadow, and a farther doorway led to the dairy. It stood open, and beyond it the eye travelled down a vista of cool slate flags and polished cream-pans.

On the threshold Ruth stood aside to let Lady Caroline enter; followed, and closed the door; stepped across and closed the door of the dairy. Lady Caroline meanwhile found a seat, and, lifting her eyeglass, studied at long range the library disposed upon the store shelves.

"We had best be quite frank," said she, as Ruth came back and stood before her.

"If you please."

"Of course it is all very scandalous and—er—nauseating, though I dare say you are unable to see it in that light. I merely mention it in justice to myself, lest you should mistake me as under-rating or even condoning Sir Oliver's conduct. You will guess, at any rate, how it must shock my daughter."

"Yes," said Ruth; and added, "Why did you bring her?"

The girl's attitude—erect before her, patient, but unflinching—had already gone some way to discompose Lady Caroline. This straight question fairly disconcerted her; the worse because she could not quarrel with the tone of it.

"I wish," she answered, "my Diana to face the facts of life, ugly though they may be." As if aware that this hardly carried conviction—for, despite herself, something in Ruth began to impress her—she shifted ground and went on, "But we will not discuss my daughter, please. The point is, this state of things cannot continue. It may be hard for you—I am trying to take your view of it—but what may pass in a young man of blood cannot be permitted when he succeeds to a title and the—er—headship of his family. It becomes then his duty to give that family clean heirs. I put it plainly?"

Ruth bent her head for assent.

"Oliver Vyell, as no doubt you know, has already

been mixed up in one entanglement, and has a child for reminder."

"Oh, but Dicky is the dearest child! the sweetest-natured, the cleanest-minded! Have you not seen him yet?"

Lady Caroline stared. As little as royalty did she understand being cross-questioned. It gave her a quite unexpected sense of helplessness.

"I fear you do not at all grasp the position," she said severely. "After all, I had done better to disregard your feelings, whatever they may be, and come to terms at once."

"No," answered Ruth, musing; "I do not understand the position; but I want to, more than I can say—and your ladyship must help me, please." She paused a moment. "In New England we prize good birth, good breeding, and what we too call 'family'; but I think the word must mean something different to you who live at home in England."

"I should hope so!" breathed Lady Caroline.

"It must be mixed up somehow with the great estates you have held for generations and the old houses you have lived in. No," she went on, as Lady Caroline would have interrupted; "please let me work it out in my own way, and then you shall correct me where I am wrong. . . . I have often thought how beautiful it must be to live in such an old house, one that has all its corners full of memories—the nurseries most of all—

of children and grandchildren, that have grown up in gentleness and courtesy and honour——"

"Good Lord!" Lady Caroline interjected.

"You mean"—Ruth smiled—"that I am talking like a book? That is partly my fault and partly our New England way; because, you see, we have to get at these things from books. Does it, after all, matter how—if only we get it right? . . . There's a tradition—what, I believe, you call an 'atmosphere'—and you are proud of it and very jealous."

"If you see all this," said Lady Caroline, mollified, "our business should be easier, with a little common sense on your part."

"And it knits you," pursued Ruth, "into a sort of family conspiracy—the womenkind especially—like bees in a hive. The head of the family is the queen bee, and you respect him amazingly; but all the same you keep your own judgment, and know when to thwart and when to disobey him, for his own and the family's good. I think you disobeyed Sir Oliver in coming here; or, at least, deceived him and came here without his knowledge."

"I am not accustomed," said Lady Caroline, rising, "to direct my conduct upon my nephew's advice."

"That, more or less, is what I was trying to say. Dear madam, let me warn you to do so, if you would manage his private affairs."

They faced each other now, upon declared war.

Lady Caroline's neck was suffused to a purplish red behind the ears. She gasped for speech. Before she found it there came a tapping on the door, and Diana Vyell entered.

CHAPTER XIII

DIANA VYELL

"HAVE you not finished yet?" Miss Diana closed the door, glanced from one to the other, and laughed with a genial brutality. "Well, it's time I came. Dear mamma, you seem to be getting the worst of it."

There was a byword among the Whig families at home (who, by intermarrying, had learned to gauge another's weaknesses), that "the Pett medal showed ill in reverse." Miss Diana had heard the saying. As a Vyell—the Vyells were, before all things, critical—she knew it to be just as well as malicious; but as a dutiful daughter she ought to have remembered.

As it was, her cool comment stung her mother to fury. The poor lady pointed a finger at Ruth, and spluttered (there is no more elegant word for the very inelegant exhibition),—

"A strumpet! One that has been whipped through the public streets."

There was a dreadful pause. Miss Diana, the first to recover herself, stepped back to the door and held it open.

"You must excuse dear mamma," she said coolly. "She has overtired herself."

But Lady Caroline continued to point a finger trembling with passion.

"Her price!" she shrilled. "Ask her that. It is all these creatures ever understand——"

Miss Diana slipped an arm beneath her elbow and firmly conducted her forth. Ruth, hearing the door shut, supposed that both women had withdrawn. She sank into a chair, and was stretching out her arms over the table to bury her face in them and sob, when the voice of the younger said quietly behind her shoulder,—

"It is always hard, after mamma's tantrums, to bring the talk back to a decent level. Nevertheless, shall we try?"

Ruth had drawn herself up again, rallying the spirit in her. It was weary, bruised; but its hour of default was not yet. Her voice dragged, but just perceptibly, as she answered Miss Vyell, who nodded, noting her courage and wondering a little,—

"I am sorry."

"Sorry?"

"Yes; it was partly my fault—very largely my fault. But your mother angered me from the first by assuming—what she had no right to assume. It was horrible."

Diana Vyell seated herself, eyed her steadily for a moment, and nodded again. "Mamma can be *raide*,

there's no denying. She was wrong, of course; that's understood. . . . Still, on the whole you have done pretty well, and had your revenge."

Ruth's eyes widened, for this was beyond her.

Diana explained. "You have let us make the most impossible fools of ourselves. It may have been more by luck than by good management, as they say; but there it is. Now don't say that revenge isn't sweet. . . . I've done you what justice I can; but if you pose as an angel from heaven, it's asking too much." While Ruth considered this, she added, "I don't know if you can put yourself in mamma's place for a moment; but if you can, the hoax is complete enough, you'll admit."

"I had rather put myself in yours."

Their eyes met, and Diana's cheek reddened slightly. "You are an extraordinary girl," she said, "and there seems no way but to be honest with you. Unfortunately, it's not so easy, even with the best will in the world. Can you understand *that?*"

"If you love him——"

"Oh, for pity's sake spare me!" Diana bounced up and stepped to the window. The red on her cheek had deepened, and she averted it to stare out at the poultry in the yard. "You are unconscionable," she said after a while, with a vexed laugh. "I have known my Cousin Oliver since we were children together. Really, you know, you're almost as brutal as mamma. . . . The truth? Let me see. Well, the truth, so near as I can

tell it, is that I just let mamma have her head, and waited to see what would happen. This was her expedition, and I took no responsibility for it from the first."

"I understand." Ruth, watching the back of her head, spoke musingly, with pursed lips.

"Excuse me"—Diana wheeled about suddenly—"you cannot possibly understand just yet. This last was my tenth season in London. One grows weary . . . and then in the confusion of papa's death—It comes to this, that I was ready for anything to get out of the old rut. I—I—shall we say that I just cast myself on fate? It may have been at the back of my head that whatever happened might be worse, but couldn't well be wearier. But if you think I had any design of setting my cap at him——"

"Hush!" said Ruth softly. "I had no such thought."

"And if you had, you would not have cared," said Diana, eyeing her again long and steadily. "Mamma—you really must forgive mamma. If you knew them, there was never a Pett that was not *impayable*. Mamma spoke of asking your price. . . . As if, for any price, he would give you up!"

"I have no price to ask, of him or of any one."

"No, and you need have none. I am often very disagreeable," said Diana candidly, "but my worst enemy won't charge me with disparaging good looks in other women."

"May I use your words," said Ruth, with a shy smile, "and say that you have no need?"

"Rubbish! And don't talk like that to me, sitting here and staring you in the face, or I may change my mind again and hate you! I never said I didn't *envy*. . . . But there, the fault was mine for speaking of 'good looks' when I should have said, 'Oh, you wonder!'" broke off Diana. "May I ask it—one question?"

"Twenty, if you will."

"It is a brutal one; horrible; worse even than mamma's."

"As I remember," said Ruth gravely, "Lady Caroline asked none. It was I who did the questioning, and—and I am afraid that led to the trouble."

Diana laughed, and after a moment the two were laughing together.

"But what is your question?"

"No, I cannot ask it now." Diana shook her head, and was grave again.

"Please!"

"Well, then, tell me—" She drew back, slightly tilting her chin and narrowing her eyes, as one who contemplates a beautiful statue or other work of art. "Is it true they whipped *that*, naked, through the streets?"

Ruth bent her head.

"It is true."

"I wonder it did not kill you," Diana murmured.

"I am strong; strong and very healthy. . . . It broke something inside; I hardly know what. But there's a story—I read it the other day—about a man who wandered in a dark wood, and came to a place where he looked into hell. Just one glimpse. He fainted, and when he awoke it was daylight, with the birds singing all around him. But he was changed more than the place, for he listened and understood all the woodland talk—what the birds were saying, and the small creeping things. And when he went back among men he answered at random, and yet in a way that astonished them; for he saw and heard what their hearts were saying, at the back of their talk. . . . Of course," smiled Ruth, "I am not nearly so wonderful as that. But something has happened to me——"

Diana nodded slowly. "—Something that, at any rate, makes you terribly disconcerting. But what about Oliver? They tell me that he browbeat the magistrates and insisted on sitting beside you."

Ruth's eyes confirmed it. They were moist, yet proud. They shone.

"I had always," mused Diana, "looked on my cousin as a carefully selfish person, even in the matter of that Dance woman. You must have turned his head completely."

"It was not *that*."

Diana stared, the low tone was so earnest, vehement

even. "Well, at all events I know him well enough to assure you he will never give you up——"

"Ah!" Ruth drew a long sigh over the joy in her heart, and a second later, hated herself for it.

"—until afterwards."

"Afterwards?" the girl echoed.

"Afterwards. My cousin Oliver is a tenacious man, and you would seem to have worked him up to temporary heroics. But I beg you to reflect that what for you must have been a real glimpse into hell"—Diana shivered—"was likely enough for him no more than an occasion for posing. Fine posing, I'll allow." She paused. "It didn't degrade him, actually. He's a Vyell; and as another of 'em I may tell you there never was a Vyell could face out actual degradation. You almost make me wish we were capable of it. To lose everything—" She paused again. "You make it more alluring, somehow, than the prospect of endless London seasons—Diana Vyell, with a fading face and her market missed—that's how they'll put it—and, *pour me distraire* this side of the grave, the dower-house, a coach, a pair of wind-broken horses, and the consolations of religion! If we were capable of it. . . . But where's the use of talking? We're Vyells. And—here's my point—Oliver is a Vyell. He may be strong-willed, but—did mamma happen to talk at all about the 'Family'?"

"I think," answered Ruth with another faint flash of mirth, "it was I who asked her questions about it."

Diana threw out her hands, laughing. "You are invincible! Well, I cannot hate you; and I've given you my warning. Make him marry you; you can if you choose, and now is your time. If there should be children—legitimate children, O my poor mamma!—there will be the devil to pay and helpless family councils, all of which I shall charge myself to enjoy and to report to you. If there should be none, we're safe with Mrs. Harry. She'll breed a dozen. . . . Am I coarse? Oh, yes, the Vyells can be coarse! while as for the Petts—but you have heard dear mamma."

They talked together for a few minutes after this. But their talk shall not be reported: for with what do you suppose it dealt?

—With Dress. As I am a living man, with Dress.

In the midst of it, and while Ruth listened eagerly to what Diana had to tell of London fashions, Lady Caroline's voice was heard summoning her daughter away.

Diana rose. "It is close upon dusk," she said, "and Mrs. Harry has command of the waggon. She drives very well—not better than I perhaps; but she understands this country better. All the same, the road—call it an apology for one—bristles with tree-stumps, and mamma's temper will be unendurable if the dark overtakes us before we reach the next farm. I forget its name."

"Natchett?"

'Yes, Natchett. We spend the night there."

"But why did not Mr. Silk drive you over?"

"Did mamma tell you he was escorting us?"

"No. I guessed."

"Nasty little fellow. Sloppy underlip. I cannot bear him. Can you?"

"I do not like him."

"It's a marvel to me that my cousin tolerates him. . . . By the way, I shall not wonder if he—Oliver, I mean—loses his temper heavily when he learns of our expedition, and bundles us straight back to Europe. I warned mamma."

"So—I am afraid—did I."

"Yes?"—and again they laughed together. "My poor parent! . . . She assured me that her duty to the Family was her armour of proof. Hark! She's calling again."

They found Lady Caroline impatient in the verandah. Ruth, to avoid speech with her, walked away to the waggon. Farmer Cordery stood at the horse's head, and Mrs. Harry beside the step, ready to mount and take the reins.

But for some reason Mrs. Harry delayed to mount. "Is it you?" she said vaguely and put out a hand, swaying slightly. Ruth caught it.

"Are you ill?"

They were alone together for a moment and hidden

from the farmer, who stood on the far side of the horse.

"Nothing—a sudden giddiness. It's quite absurd, too; when I've been as strong as a donkey all my life."

Ruth asked her a question. . . . Some word of woman's lore, dropped years ago by her own silly mother, crossed her memory. (They had been outspoken, in the cottage above the beach.) It surprised Mrs. Harry, who answered it before she was well aware, and so stood staring, trembling with surmise.

"God bless you!" Ruth put out an arm on an impulse to clasp her waist, but checked it and beckoned instead to Diana.

"*You* take the reins and drive," she commanded.

Diana questioned her with a glance, but obeyed and climbed on board. Ruth was helping Mrs. Harry to mount after her when Lady Caroline thrust herself forward, by the step.

Now since Diana had hold of the reins, and Mrs. Harry was for the moment in no condition to lend a hand, and since Lady Caroline would as lief touch leprosy as have accepted help from Ruth Josselin, her ascent into the van fell something short of dignity. The rearward of her person was ample; she hitched her skirt in the step, thus exposing an inordinate amount of not over-clean white stocking; and, to make matters worse, Farmer Cordery cast off at the wrong moment and stood back from the horse's head.

"Losh! but I'm sorry," said he, gazing after the catastrophic result. "Look at her, there, kickin' like a cast ewe. . . ." He turned a serious face on Ruth and added, "Vigorous, too, for her years."

Ruth, returning to the verandah, bent over little Miss Quiney, who sat unsmiling, with rigid eyes.

"Dear Tatty,"—she kissed her—"were they so very dreadful?"

Miss Quiney started as if awaking from a nightmare.

"That woman—darling, whatever her rank, I *cannot* term her a lady——"

"Go on, dear."

"I cannot. Sit beside me, here, for a while, and let me feel my arm about you. . . ."

They sat thus for a long while silent, while twilight crept over the plain and wrapped itself about the homestead.

Ruth was thinking. "If I forfeit this, it will be hardest of all."

CHAPTER XIV

MR. SILK PROPOSES

FARMER CORDERY had six grown sons—Jonathan, George, William, Increase, Homer, and Lemuel—the eldest eight-and-twenty, the youngest sixteen. All were strapping fellows, and each as a matter of course had fallen over head and ears in love with Ruth.

They were good lads and knew it to be hopeless. She had stepped into their home as a goddess from a distant star, to abide with them for a while. They worshipped, none confessing his folly; but it made them her slaves, and emulous to shine before her as though she had been a queen of tournay. Because of her presence (it must be sadly owned) challengings, bickerings, even brotherly quarrels, disturbed more and more the patriarchal peace of Sweetwater Farm. "I dunno what's come over the boys," their father grumbled; "al'ays showing off an' jim-jeerin'. Regilar cocks on a dunghill. A few years agone I'd 've cured it wi' the strap; but now there's no remedy."

William had challenged his eldest brother Jonathan to "put" a large round-shot that lay in the verandah.

Their father had brought it home from the capture of Louisbourg as a souvenir. Jonathan and George had served at Louisbourg too, in the Massachusetts Volunteers; but William, though of age to fight, had been left at home to look after the farm and his mother. It had been a sore disappointment at the time; now that Jonathan and George had taken on a sudden to boast, it rankled. Hence the challenge. The three younger lads joined in. If they could not defeat their seniors, they could at least dispute the mastery among themselves. Thereupon in all seriousness (ingenuous youths!) they voted that Miss Josselin should be asked to umpire.

The contest took place next morning after breakfast, in a paddock beyond the elms, with Ruth for umpire and sole spectator. Nothing had been said to the farmer, who was fast losing his temper with "these derned wagerings," and might have come down with a veto that none dared disobey. He had ridden off, however, at sun-up to the mountain, to look after the half-wild hogs he kept at pasture among the woods at its base.

Ruth measured out the casts conscientiously. In no event would the young men have disputed her arbitrament; but, as it happened, this nicety was thrown away. Jonathan's "put" of forty feet—the shot weighed close upon sixteen pounds—easily excelled the others', who

were sportsmen and could take a whipping without bad blood or dispute. The winner crowed a little, to be sure; it was the New England way. But Lemuel the youngest, who had outgrown his strength, had made a deplorable "put," and the rest jeered at him, to relieve their feelings. The boy fired up. "Oh, have your laugh!" he blazed, with angry tears in his eyes. "But when it comes to running, there's not one of you but knows I can put circles round him."

"Take you on, this moment," answered up young Increase. "Say, boys, we'll all take him on."

Jonathan had no mind for any such "foolishness." He had won, and was content; and running didn't become the dignity of a grown man. "We didn't run at Louisbourg, I guess." George echoed him. George could out-tire even Jonathan at wood-cutting, but had no length of leg.

But Ruth having compassion on the boy's hurt feelings, persuaded them. They could refuse no straight request of hers. She pointed to an outlying elm that marked the boundary of the second pasture field beyond the steading. This should be the turning-post, and would give them a course well over half a mile, with a water-jump to be crossed twice. She ranged them in line, and dropped her handkerchief for signal.

They were off. She stood with the sun at her back and watched the race. George, of the short legs, broad shoulders, and bullet head, was a sprinter (as we call it

nowadays) and shot at once to the front, with Homer not far behind, and Increase disputing the third place with Lemuel. Jonathan and William made scarcely a show of competing. The eldest lad, indeed, coming to the brook, did not attempt to jump, but floundered heavily through it, scrambled up the farther bank, and lumbered on in hopeless pursuit. It was here that Lemuel's long easy stride asserted itself, and taking first place he reached the tree with several yards' lead.

"He will win at his ease now," said Ruth to herself; and just at that moment her ears caught the sound of a horse's footfall. She turned; but the sun shone full in her eyes, and not for a second or two did she recognise her visitor, Mr. Silk.

He was on horseback, and, stooping from his saddle, was endeavouring just now—but very unhandily—to unhasp the gate with the crook of his riding-whip. Ruth did not offer to go to his help.

He managed it at last, thrust the horse through by vigorous use of his knees, and was riding straight up to the house. But just then he caught sight of her, changed his course, and came towards her at a walk.

"Ah, good-morning," he called.

"Good-morning."

He dismounted. "Thought I'd ride over and pay you a call. The ladies will not be starting on their return journey for another couple of hours. So I borrowed a horse."

"Evidently."

"There's something wrong with him, I doubt." Mr. Silk was disagreeably red and moist.

"I dare say he is not used to being ridden mainly—or was it wholly?—on the curb."

He grinned. "Well, and I'm not used to riding, and that's a fact. But"—he leered the compliment—"there are few dangers I would not brave for a glance from Miss Josselin."

"You flatter me, sir. But I believe you braved a worse, yesterday, without claiming that reward."

"Ah! You mean that Sir Oliver will be angry when he gets wind of our little expedition? The ladies persuaded me—Adam's old excuse; I can deny nothing to the sex. . . . But what have we yonder? A race?"

"It would appear so."

"A very hollow one, if I may criticise. That youngster moves like a deer. . . . And what is his reward to be?—another glance of these bright eyes? Ah, Miss Josselin, you make fools—and heroes—of us all!"

Ruth turned from him to applaud young Lemuel, who came darting into the enclosure.

"See old Jonathan!" panted the boy, looking back and laughing. "That's how they ran at Louisbourg. . . . Miss Josselin, you should have made it a mile and I'd have shown you some broken-winded ones." He laughed again and turned in apology to Mr. Silk. "I'll

take your horse to stable, sir, if you'll let me catch my breath."

The others came straggling up, a little abashed at sight of the stranger, but not surprised out of their good manners.

"A clergyman?" said Jonathan. "My father will be home before sundown, sir. He will be proud if you can stay and have dinner with us."

Mr. Silk explained that he had ridden over from Natchett to call on Miss Josselin and had but an hour to spare. They insisted, however, that he must eat before leaving, and they led away his horse to bait, leaving him and Ruth together.

"Will you come into the house?" she asked.

"With your leave we can talk better here. . . . So you guessed that I made one of the party? Miss Vyell told me."

"It was not difficult to guess."

"And you admired my courage?"

Ruth's eyebrows went up to a fine arch. "When you were careful to keep in hiding?"

"From motives of delicacy, believe me. It occurred to me that Lady Caroline might—er—speak her mind, and I had no wish to be distressed by it, or to distress you with my presence."

"I thank you for so much delicacy, sir."

"But Lady Caroline—let us do her justice! She calls a spade a spade, but there's no malice in it. You

stood up to her, I gather. We've been discussing you this morning, and you may take my word she don't think the worse of you for it. They're sportsmen, these high-born people. I come of good family myself, and know the sort. 'Slog and take a slogging; shake hands and no bad blood'—that's their way. The fine old British way, after all." Mr. Silk puffed his cheeks and blew.

"You have been discussing me with Lady Caroline?"

"Yes," he answered flatly. "Yes," he repeated, and rolled his eyes. "All for your good, you know. Of course she started by calling you names and taking the worst for granted. But I wouldn't have *that*."

"Go on, sir, if you please."

"I wouldn't have it, because I didn't believe it. If I did—hang it!—I shouldn't be here. You might do me that justice?"

"Why *are* you here?"

"I'm coming to that; but first I want you to open your eyes to the position. You may think it's all very pretty and romantic and like Fair Rosamond—without the frailty as yet: that's granted. But how will it end? Eh? That's the question, if you'd bring your common sense to bear on it."

"Suppose you help me, sir," said Ruth meekly.

"That's right. I'm here to help, and in more ways than one. . . . Well, I know Sir Oliver; Lady Caroline knows him too; and if it's marriage you're after

you might as well whistle the moon. You don't believe me?" he wound up, for she was eyeing him with an inscrutable smile.

She lifted her shoulder a little. "For the sake of your argument we will say that it is so."

'Then what's to be the end? I repeat. Look here, missy. We spar a bit when we meet, you and I; but I'd be sorry to see you go the way you're going. 'Pon my honour I would. You're as pretty a piece of flesh as a man could find on this side of the Atlantic, and what's a sharp tongue but a touch of spice to it? Piquancy, begad, to a fellow like me! . . . And—what's best of all, perhaps—you'd pass for a lady anywhere."

She shrank back a pace before this incredible vulgarity; but not even yet did she guess the man's drift.

"So I put it to you, why not?" he continued, flushing as he came to the point and contemplated his prey. "You don't see yourself as a parson's wife, eh? You're not the cut. But for that matter *I'm* not the ordinary cut of parson. T'other side of the water we'd fly high. They'll not have heard of Port Nassau, over there, nor of the little nest at Sabines; and with Lady Caroline to give us a jump-off—I have her promise. She runs a Chapel of her own, somewhere off St. James's. Give me a chance to preach to the fashionable—let me get a foot inside the pulpit door—and, with you to turn their heads in the Mall below, strike me if I wouldn't finish

up a Bishop! *La belle Sauvage*—they'd put it around I'd found my beauty in the backwoods, and converted her. . . . Well, what d'ye say? Isn't that a prettier prospect than to end as Sir Oliver's cast-off?"

She put a hand backwards, and found a gate-rail to steady her.

"Ah! . . . How you dare!" she managed to murmur.

"Dare? Eh! you're thinking of Sir Oliver?" He laughed easily. "Lady Caroline will put *that* all right. He'll be furious at first, no doubt; my fine gentleman thinks himself the lion in the fable—when he shares out the best for himself, no dog dares bark. But we'll give him the go-by, and afterwards he can't squeal without showing himself the public fool. . . . Squeal? I hope he will. I owe him one."

At this moment young George and Increase Cordery came past the far corner of the house with their team, their harness-chains jingling as they rode afield. At sight of them a strong temptation assailed Ruth, but she thrust it from her.

"Sir"—she steadied her voice—"bethink you, please, that I have only to lift a hand and those two, with their brothers, will drag you through the farm pond."

Before he could answer, she called to them. As they turned and walked their horses towards her she glanced at Mr. Silk, half mischievously in spite of her fierce anger. He was visibly perturbed; but his face, mottled

yellow with terror, suggested loathing rather than laughter.

"I am sorry to trouble you, but will you please fetch Mr. Silk's horse? He must return at once."

When they were gone she turned to him.

"I am sorry to dismiss you thus, sir, after the—the honour you have done me; the more sorry because you will never understand."

Indeed—his scare having passed—he was genuinely surprised, indignant.

"I understand this much," he answered coarsely, "that I've offered to make you an honest woman, but you prefer to be—" The word was on his tongue-tip, but hung fire there.

She had turned her back on him, and stood with her arms resting for support on the upper rail of the gate. She heard him walk away towards the stable-yard. . . . By-and-by she heard him ride off—heard the click of the gate behind him. A while after this she listened, and then bowed her face upon her arms.

CHAPTER XV

THE CHOOSING

THE minutes passed, and still she leaned there. At long intervals, when a sob would not be repressed, her shoulders heaved and fell. But it was characteristic of Ruth Josselin throughout her life that she hated to indulge in distress, even when alone. As a child she had been stoical; but since the day of her ordeal in Port Nassau she had not once wept in self-pity. She had taught herself to regard all self-pity as shameful.

She made no sound. The morning heat had increased, and across it the small morning noises of the farm were borne drowsily—the repeated strokes of a hatchet in the backyard, where young Lemuel split logs; the voice of Mrs. Cordery, also in the backyard, calling the poultry for their meal of Indian corn; the opening and shutting of windows as rooms were redded and dusted; lastly, Miss Quiney's tentative touch on the spinet. Sir Oliver in his lordly way had sent a spinet by cart from Boston; and Tatty, long since outstripped by her pupil, had a trick of picking out passages from the more difficult pieces of music and

"sampling" them as she innocently termed it—a few chords now and again, but melodies for the most part, note by note hesitatingly attempted with one finger.

For a while these noises fell on Ruth's ear unheeded. Then something like a miracle happened.

Of a sudden either the noises ceased or she no longer heard them. It was as if a hush had descended on the farmstead; a hush of expectancy. Still leaning on the gate, she felt it operate within her—an instantaneous calm at first, soothing away the spirit's anguish as though it were ointment delicately laid on a bodily wound. Not an ache, even, left for reminder! but healing peace at a stroke, and in the hush of it small thrills awaking, stirring, soft ripples scarcely perceptible, stealing, hesitating, until overtaken by reinforcements of bliss and urged in a flood; bathing her soul.

He was near! He must be here, close at hand.

She lifted her head and gazed around. For minutes her closed eyeballs had been pressed down upon her arms, and the sunlight played tricks with her vision. Strange hues of scarlet and violet danced on the sky and around the fringes of the elms.

But he was there! Yes, beyond all doubting it was he. . . .

He had ridden in through the gateway on his favourite, Bayard, and with a led horse at his side. He was calling, in that easy masterful voice of his, for one

of the Cordery lads to take the pair to stable. Lemuel came running.

In the act of dismounting he caught sight of her and paused to lift his hat. But before dismissing the horses to stable he looked them over, as a good master should.

He was coming towards her. . . . Three paces away he halted, and his smile changed to a frown.

"You are in trouble?"

"It has passed. I am happy now; and you are welcome, my lord."

She gave him her hand. He detained it.

"Who has annoyed you? Those women?"

She shook her head. "You might make a better guess, for you must have met him on the way. Mr. Silk was here a while ago."

"Silk?"

"And he—he asked me to marry him."

"The hound! But I don't understand. Silk here? I see the game; he must have played escort to those infernal women. . . . Somehow I hadn't suspected it, and Lady Caroline kept that cat in the bag when I surprised her at Natchett an hour ago. I wonder why?"

Ruth had a shrewd guess; but, fearing violence, forbore to tell it.

He went on: "But what puzlzes me more is, how I missed meeting him."

In truth the explanation was simple enough. Mr. Silk, turning the corner of the lane, where it bent sharply around Farmer Cordery's wood-stacks, had chanced to spy Sir Oliver on a rise of the road to the eastward, and had edged aside and taken cover behind the stacks. He was now making for Natchett at his best speed.

"A while ago, you say? How long ago? The thief cannot have gone far—" Sir Oliver looked behind him. Clearly he had a mind to call for his horse again and to pursue.

But Ruth put out a hand. "He is not worth my lord's anger."

For a moment he stood undecided, then broke into a laugh. "Was he riding?"

"He was on horseback, to be more exact."

"Then he'll find it a stony long way back to Boston." He laughed again. "You see, I've been worrying myself, off and on, about that trick of Madcap's—I'll be sworn she came within an ace of crossing her legs that day. I'd a mind to ride over and bring you Forester—he's a soberer horse, and can be trusted at timber. I'd resolved on it, in short, even before my brother Harry happened to blurt out the secret of Lady Caroline's little expedition. Soon as I heard that, I put George the groom on Forester, and came in chase. . . . I find her ladyship at Natchett, and after some straight talking I put George in charge of the conspirators, with

instructions to drive them home. They chose to say nothing of Silk, and I didn't guess; so now the rogue must either leg it back or gall himself on a waggon-horse."

"You worried yourself about me?"

"Certainly. You don't suppose I want my pupil to break her neck?"

"You do Madcap injustice. Why, yesterday she jumped—she almost flew—this very gate on which I am leaning."

"The more reason—" he began, and broke off. His tone had been light, but when he spoke again it had grown graver, sincerer. "It is a fact that I worried about you, but that is not all the reason why I am here. The whole truth is more selfish. . . . Ruth, I cannot do without you."

She put up a hand, leaning back against the gate as though giddy.

"But why?" he urged, as she made no other response. "Is it that you still doubt me—or yourself, perhaps."

"Both," she murmured. "It is not so easy as you pretend." Bliss had weakened her for a while, but the weakness was passing.

"Those women have been talking to you. I can engage, whatever they said, I gave it back to 'em with interest. They sail by the next ship. . . . But what did they say?"

"*They say. What say they? Let them say,*" Ruth

quoted, her lips smiling albeit her eyes were moist. "Does it matter what they said?"

"No; for I can guess. However the old harridan put it, you were asked to give me up; and, after all, everything turns on our answer to that. I have given you mine. What of yours?" He stepped close. "Ruth, will you give me up?"

She put out her hands as one groping, sightless, and in pain.

"Ah, you are cruel! . . . You know I cannot."

BOOK III

THE BRIDALS

CHAPTER I

BETROTHED

Sir Oliver rode back to Boston that same evening. Ruth had stipulated that his promise to her folk in the beach cottage still held good; that when the three years were out, and not a day before, she would return to them and make her announcement. Meanwhile, although the coast would soon be clear of her enemies and he desired to have her near, she begged off returning to Sabines. Here at Sweetwater Farm she could ride, with the large air about her and freedom to think. It was not that she shirked books and tutors. She would turn to them again, by-and-by. But at Sweetwater she could think things out, and she had great need of thinking.

He yielded. He was passionately in love and could deny her nothing. He would ride over and pay his respects once a week.

So he took his leave, and Ruth abode with the Corderys and Miss Quiney. Disloyal though she felt it, she caught herself wishing, more than once, that her lord could have taken dear Tatty back with him to Boston.

I desire to depict Ruth Josselin here as the woman she was, not as an angel.

Now Tatty, when Sir Oliver had led Ruth indoors and presented her as his affianced wife, had been taken aback; not scandalised, but decidedly—and, for so slight a creature, heavily—taken aback. It is undoubted that she loved Ruth dearly; nay, so dearly that in a general way no fortune was too high to befall her darling. What dreams she had entertained for her I cannot tell. Very likely they had been at once splendid and vague. Miss Quiney was not worldly-wise, yet her wisdom did not transcend what little she knew of the world. She had great notions of Family, for example. She had imagined, may be—still in a vague way—that Sir Oliver would some day provide his *protégée* with a mate of good, or at least sufficient, Colonial birth. She had been outraged by Lady Caroline's suggestions. Now this, while it triumphantly refuted them, did seem to show that Lady Caroline had not altogether lacked ground for suspicion.

In fine, the dear creature received a shock, and in her flurry could not dissemble it.

Sir Oliver did not perceive this. In the first flush of conquest all men are a trifle fatuous, unobservant. No woman is. Miss Quiney's arms did not suddenly go out to Ruth. Ruth noted it. She was just: she understood. But (I repeat) she was a woman and women remember indelibly whatever small thing happens at this crisis of their lives.

In the end Miss Quiney stretched forth her arms;

but at first she seemed to shrivel and grow very small in her chair. Nor can her first comment be called adequate,—

"Dear sir—oh, but excuse me!—this is so sudden!"

Later, when she and Ruth were left alone, she explained, still a little tremulously, "You took me all of a heap, my dear! I can hardly realise it, even now. . . . Such a splendid position! You will go to London, I doubt not; and be presented at Court; and be called Lady Vyell. . . . Have you thought of the responsibilities?"

She had, and she had not. Her own promised splendours, the command of wealth and of a great household—this aspect of the future was blank to her as yet. But another presented itself and frightened her: it engaged her conscience in doubts even when she shook it free of fears. The Family—that mysterious shadow of which Lady Caroline no doubt showed as the ugliest projection! Ruth was conscientious. She divined that behind Lady Caroline's aggressiveness the shadow held something truly sacred and worth guarding; something impalpable and yet immensely solid; something not to be defied or laughed away because inexplicable, but venerable precisely because it could not be explained; something not fashioned hastily upon reason, but built by slow accretion, with the years for its builders—mortared by sentiments, memories, traditions, decencies, trivialities good and bad, even (may be) by

the blood of foolish quarrels—but founded and welded more firmly, massed more formidably, than any structure of mere reason; and withal a temple wherein she, however chastely, might never serve without profaning it.

I do most eagerly desire you, at this point in her story, to be just to Ruth Josselin. I wish you to remember what she had suffered, in the streets, at the hands of self-righteous folk; to understand that it had killed all religion in her, with all belief in its rites, but not the essential goodness of her soul.

She at any rate, and according to the light given her, was incurably just. Weighing on the one hand her love and Oliver Vyell's, on the other the half-guessed injury their marriage might do to him and to others of his race; weighing them not hastily but through long hours of thought: carrying her doubts off to the hills and there considering them in solitude, under the open sky; casting out from the problem all of self save only her exceeding love; this strange girl—made strange by man's cruelty—decided to give herself in due time, but to exact no marriage.

Why should she? The blessing of a clergyman meant nothing to her, as she was sure it meant nothing to her lover. Why should she tie him a day beyond the endurance of his love? Beyond the death of the thing itself what sanctity could live in its husk? And, moreover, in any event was she not his slave?

So she reasoned: and let the reader call her reasoning by any name he will. By some standards it was wicked; by others wrong. It forgot one of the strongest arguments against itself, as she was in time to prove. But let none call her unchaste.

After certain weeks she brought her arguments to him; standing before him, halting in her speech a little but entreating him with eyes as straight as they were modest. Her very childishness appealed against her arguments.

He listened, marvelled, and broke into joyous laughter. He would have none of it. Why, she was fit to be a queen!—a thousand times too good for him. His family? Their prejudices should fall down before her and worship. As little as she did he set store by rites of the Church or believe in them: but, as the world went, to neglect them would be to stint her of the first honour. Was this fair to him, who desired to heap honours upon her and would stretch for them even beyond his power?

His passion, rather than his arguments, overbore her. That passion rejuvenated him. Once or twice it choked his voice, and her heart leapt; for she was a sensible girl and, remembering the dead Margaret Dance, had schooled herself to know that what was first love with her, drenching her heart with ecstasy, could never be first love with him. Yet now and again the miracle declared itself and instead of a lord, com-

manding her, he stood before her a boy: and with a boy's halting speech—ah, so much dearer than eloquence!

Beyond a doubt he was over head and ears in love. He was honest, too, in his desire to set her high and make a queen of her. In Boston, Mr. Ned Manley, architect of genius, was sitting up into the small hours of morning; now, between potations of brandy, cursing Sir Oliver for a slave-driver, while Batty Langton looked on and criticised with a smile that tolerated a world of fools for the sake of one or two inspired ones, anon working like a demon and boasting while he worked. Already on a hillside between Boston and Sweetwater Farm—the hill itself could be seen from the farmstead, but not their operations, which lay on the far side—three hundred labourers were toiling in gangs, levelling, terracing, hewing down forest trees, laying foundations. Already ships were heading for Boston Harbour with statuary and wrought marble in their holds, all to beautify a palace meet for Oliver Vyell's bride. Thus love wrought in him, in a not extraordinary way if we allow for his extraordinary means. He and Ruth, between them, were beginning to sing the eternal duet of courtship:—

He.—Since that I love, this world has grown;
Yea, widens all to be possest.
She.—Since that I love, it narrows down
Into one little nest.

He.—Since that I love, I rage and burn
O'erwhelming Nineveh with Rome!
She.—In vain! in vain! Fond man return—
Such doings be at home!

He had reached an age to know himself in his own despite. He was no boy, to dream of building or overthrowing empires. But he could build his love a palace. His friend Batty Langton bore with all this energy and smiled wisely.

Ruth guessed nothing of these preparations. But his vehemence broke down her scruples, overbore and swept away what she had built in hours of patient thinking. She yielded: she would be married, since he willed it.

But the debate had been; and it left Tatty, with her maxims and taken-for-granted practicalities, hard to endure at times.

"The outfit?" Tatty would suggest. "At this distance from civilisation we cannot even begin to take it in hand. Yet it should be worthy of the occasion, and men—speaking with all respect of Sir Oliver—are apt to overlook these things. Dear Ruth, I do not know if you have thought of returning to Sabines. . . . So much handier. . . ."

Ruth, half-wilfully, refused to think of returning to Sabines.

But if Tatty fussed, the Cordery lads made more than recompense for her fussing. From the hour when, at supper-time, Sir Oliver led Miss Josselin into the kitchen, his bride affianced, all discord ceased between these young men. He was their master and patron, and they thenceforth were her servants only—her equal champions should occasion ever be given.

Thenceforth too, and until the hour when at night-fall she drove away from Sweetwater Farm, she was their goddess: and as, while Phœbus served shepherd to Admetus, his fellow swains noted that never had harvest been so heavy or life so full of sweet and healthy rivalries, so these young men, who but once or twice saw Ruth Josselin after the hour of her departure, talked in scattered homesteads all their days of that good time at Sweetwater, and of the season's wonderful bearings. Undoubtedly the winter was a gentle one—so gentle that scarcely a day denied Ruth a bracing ride: the spring that followed seemed to rain and shine almost in obedience to Farmer Cordery's evening prayer (and it never left the Almighty in doubt of his exact wishes). Summer came, and the young men, emulous but no longer bickering, scythed down prodigious swathes; harvest-fall, and they put in their sickles among tall stalk and full ear.

Sir Oliver and Ruth watched the harvest. When all was gathered, the young men begged that she would

ride home on the last load. They escorted her back to the farmstead, walking two-by-two before the cart, under the young moon.

Next evening at the same hour she bade them farewell and climbed into a light waggon that stood ready, its lamps throwing long shafts of light. Horses had been sent on ahead, with two servants for escort, and would await her at dawn, far on the road; but to-night she would sleep in the waggon, upon a scented bed of hay. The reason for this belated start Sir Oliver kept a secret from her. There was a certain hill upon the way, and he would not have her pass it by daylight. He had returned that morning to Boston; Miss Quiney with him.

Ruth's eyes were moist to leave these good folk. Farmer Cordery cleared his throat and blessed her in parting. She blessed them in return.

The waggon, after following the Boston road for a while, turned northward, bearing her by strange ways and through the night towards Port Nassau.

CHAPTER II

THE RETURN

THE breakers boomed up the beach, and in the blown spray Old Josselin pottered, bareheaded and barefoot. His eyesight had grown dimmer, but otherwise his bodily health had improved, for nowadays he ate food enough; and, as for purblindness, why there was no real need to keep watch on the sea. He did it from habit.

Ruth came on him much as Sir Oliver had come on him three years before; the roar of the breakers swallowing all sound of Madcap's hoofs until she was close at his shoulder. Now as then he turned about with a puzzled face, peered, and lifted his hand a little way as if to touch his forehead.

"Your ladyship—" he mumbled, noting only her fine clothes.

"Grandfather!"

She slipped down from saddle and kissed him, in sight of the grooms, who had reined up fifty yards away.

"What? Ruth, is it? . . . Here's news, now, for your mother, poor soul!"

"How is she? Take me to her at once, please."

"Eh! . . . Your mother keeps well enough; though doited, o' course—doited. Properly grown you be, too, I must say. . . . I didn't reckernise ye comin' on me like that. Inches ye've grown."

"And you—well, you look just the same as ever; only fuller and haler."

"Do I?" The old man gave her in the old way certain details of his health. "But I'm betterin'. Food's a blessin', however ye come by it."

On a sudden, as she read his thought, the very tokens of health in his face accused her . . . and, a moment since, she had been merely glad to note them.

"Clothes too, ye'll say? I don't set store by clothes, meself; but a fine han'some quean they make of ye. That's a mare, too! Cost a hundred guineas, I shouldn't wonder. . . . Well, an' how's the gentleman keepin'? Turned into a lord, you told us, in one o' your letters: that, or something o' the sort."

"Then at any rate you have read my letters?"

"Why, to be sure. My old eyes can't tackle 'em; but your mother reads 'em out, over an' over, an' I tell her what this an' that means, an' get the sense into her head somehow."

"Take me to her." Ruth signalled to the grooms, who came forward. They were well-trained servants, recent imports from England, and Sir Oliver had billeted them where they could hear no gossip of her

history. They had kept their distance with faces absolutely impassive while their mistress kissed and chatted with this old man, and they merely touched their hats, with a "Very good, miss," when she gave over the mare, saying she would walk up to the cottage and rest for an hour.

"Oo-oof! the dear old smell!" Ruth, before she turned, drew in a deep breath of it. There was no one near to observe and liken her, standing there with blown tresses and wind-wrapt skirt, on the edge of Ocean, to the fairest among goddesses, the Sea-born.

She walked up the beach, the old man beside her.

"Ay: you reckernise the taste of it, I dessay. But you'd not come back to it, not you. . . . It must be nigh upon dinner: my belly still keeps time like a clock. M'ria shall cook us a few clams. Snuffin' won't bring it back like clams." He chuckled, supposing he had made a joke.

Her mother had caught sight of them from the window where she sat as usual watching the sea. As they climbed the slope, picking their way along loosely-piled wreckwood, she opened the door and stood at first fastening a clean apron and then rubbing her palms up and down upon it, as though they were sweaty and she would dry them before she shook hands.

"That's so, M'ria!" the old man shouted cheerfully, as his eyes made out the patch of white apron in the doorway. "It's our Ruth, all right—come to pay us a

visit!" He bawled it, at close quarters. This was his way of conveying intelligence to the crazed brain.

Mrs. Josselin, awed by her daughter's appearance—a little perhaps, by her loveliness; more, belike, by her air of distinction and her fine dress (though this was simple enough—a riding suit of grey velvet, with a broad-brimmed hat and one black feather)—withdrew behind her back the hand she had been wiping, and stood irresolute, smiling in a timid way.

It was horrible. Ruth stretched out her arms lest in another moment her mother should bob a curtsy.

"Mother—mother!"

She took the poor creature in her arms and held her, shivering a little as she sought her lips; for Mrs. Josselin, albeit scrupulously clean, had a trace of that strange wild smell that haunts the insane. Ruth had lived with it aforetime and ceased to notice it. Now she recognised it, and shivered.

"Surely, surely," said the mother as soon as the embrace released her. "I always said you would come back, some day. In wealth or in trouble, I always told grandfather you would come back. . . . That hat, now—the very latest I'll be bound. . . . And how is your good gentleman?"

"Mother! Please do not call him that!"

"Why, you ha'n't quarrelled, ha' you?"

"Indeed, no."

"That's right." Mrs. Josselin nodded, looking ex-

tremely wise. "Show a good face always, no matter what happens; and, with your looks there's no saying what you can't persuade him to. All the Pococks were good-looking, though I say it who shouldn't: and as for the Josselins——"

"Sit down, mother," Ruth commanded. She must get this over, and soon, for it was straining at her heart. "Sit down and listen to what I have to tell. Afterwards you shall get me something to eat; and while you are dishing it—dear mother, you were always briskest about the fireplace—we will talk in the old style."

"Surely, surely." Mrs. Josselin seated herself on the block-stool.

"You remember the promise? In three years—and yesterday the three years were up—I was to come back and report myself."

"Is it three years, now? Time *do* slip away."

"The gel's right," corroborated old Josselin, pausing as he filled a pipe. "I remember it."

"This is what I have to report—Sir Oliver has asked me to marry him."

There was a pause. "I dunno," said the old man sourly—and Ruth knew that tone so well! He always used it on hearing good news, lest he should be mistaken for genial. "I dunno why you couldn' ha' told us that straight off, without beatin' round the bush. It's important enough."

"He has asked me to marry him, and I have said 'yes.' "

"What else *could* ye say?"

"Of *course* she said 'yes,' the darling!" Mrs. Josselin clapped her hands together, without noise. "What did I ever say but that 'twas a chance, if you used it? But when is it to be?" she added, suspiciously.

"Very soon. As soon as I please, in fact."

"You take my advice and pin him to it. The sooner the better—eh, darling?"

Ruth rose wearily. "I see the pot boiling," she said with a glance at the fireplace, "and I have been on horseback since seven o'clock. Mother, won't you give me food, at least? I am hungry as a hunter——"

But this was very nearly a fib. She had been hungry enough, half an hour ago. Now her throat worked in disgust—not at the hovel and its poverty; for these were dear—but at the thought that thus for three years her dearest had been thinking of her. It had been the home of infinite mutual tolerance, of some affection—an affection not patent perhaps—and for years it had been all she owned. Now it lived on, but was poisoned; the atmosphere of the humble place was poisoned, and through her.

"Food?"—her mother rose. "Food to be sure, and bed, deary—for you'll be sleeping here, of course?"

"No. I go on to Port Nassau; and thence in a few days to a lodging up in the back country."

"Such a mare as she's ridin' too!" put in the old man.

"I wouldn't put up at Port Nassau, if I was you," said her mother, pausing as she made ready to lift the pot-handle. "They won't know what you've told us, and they'll cast up the old shame on you."

"M'ria ha'n't talked so sensible for days," said the old man. "Joy must ha' steadied her. . . . Clams, is it? Clams, I hope."

The meal over, Ruth took leave of them, reproaching herself for her haste, though troubled to have delayed the grooms so long.

She mounted and rode forward thoughtfully.

The grooms did not wear the Vyell white and scarlet, but a sober livery of dark blue. Between more serious thoughts Ruth wondered if any one in Port Nassau would recognise her.

The hostess of the Bowling Green did not, but came to the door and dropped curtsies to her, as to a grand lady. She startled Ruth, however, by respectfully asking her name.

Ruth, who had forgotten to provide against this, had a happy inspiration.

"I am Miss Ruth," she said.

The landlady desired to be informed how to spell it. "For," said she, "I keep a list of all the quality that honour the Bowling Green."

Ruth signed it boldly in the book presented, and ordered supper to be brought to her room; also a fire to be lit. She was given the same room in which she had knelt to pull off Oliver Vyell's boots.

Whilst supper was preparing, in a panic lest she should be recognised she tied her hair high and wound it with a rope of pearls—her lover's first gift to her. In her dress she could make little change. The waggon following in her wake would be due to-morrow with her boxes; but for to-night she must rely on the few necessaries of toilet the grooms had brought, packed in small hold-alls at their saddle bows.

Her fears proved to be idle. The meal was served by a small maid, upon whom she once or twice looked curiously. She wondered if the landlady scolded her often.

After supper she sat a long while in thought over the fire, shielding its heat from her with her hands. They were exquisite hands, but once or twice she turned them palms-uppermost, as though to make sure they bore no scars.

CHAPTER III

NESTING

SHE spent a week in Port Nassau, recognised by none. She walked its streets, her features half hidden by a veil; and among the Port Nassauers she passed for an English lady of quality who, by one of those freaks from which the wealthy suffer, designed to rent or build herself a house in the neighbourhood. Her accent by this time was English; by unconscious preference she had learnt it from her lover, translating and adapting it to her own musical tones. It deceived the Port Nassauers completely.

She visited many stores, always with a man-servant in attendance; and, always paying down ready-money, bought of the best the little town could afford (but chiefly small articles of furniture, with some salted provisions and luxuries such as well-to-do skippers took to sea for their private tables). The waggon had arrived; it, too, contained a quantity of wine and provisions, camp furniture, clothes, etc.

At the end of the week she left Port Nassau with her purchases, the two men escorting her, the laden waggon

following. They climbed the hill above the town, and struck inland from the base of the peninsula, travelling north and by west. The road—a passably good one—led them across a dip of cultivated land, shaped like a saddle-back, with a line of forest trees topping its farther ridge. This was the fringe of a considerable forest, and beyond the ridge they rode for miles in the shade of boughs, slanting their way along a gentle declivity, with here and there glimpses of a broad plain below, and of a broad-banded river winding through it in many loops.

But these glimpses were rare, and a stranger could not guess the extent of the plain until, stepping from the forest into broad day, he found himself on the very skirts of it.

An ample plain it was; a grass ground of many thousand acres, where fifty years ago the Indians had pastured, but where now the farmers laboriously saved their hay when the floods allowed, and in spring launched their punts and went duck-shooting with long guns and wading-boots. For in winter one sheet of water—or of ice, as it might happen—covered the meadows and made the great river one with the many brooks that threaded their way to her. But at this season they ran low between their banks and the eye easily traced their meanderings, while the main stream itself rolled its waters in full view—in places three hundred feet wide, and seldom narrower than one

hundred. Dwarf willows fringed it: at some distance back from the shore, alders and reddening maples dotted the meadows, with oaks here and there, and everywhere wild cranberry bushes in great moss-like hummocks.

It ran sluggishly, and always—however long the curve—up to its near or right bank the plain lay flat, or broken only by these hummocks. But from the farther shore the ground rose at a moderate slope, and here were farmhouses and haystacks planted above reach of the waters. A high ridge of forest backed this inhabited terrace, and dense forest filled the eastward gap through which the river passed down to these levels from the cleft hills.

At one point on the farther shore the houses had drawn together in a cluster, and towards this the road ran in a straight line on the raised causeway that had suffered much erosion from bygone floods. It cost the travellers an hour to reach the river-bank, where a ferry plied to and from the village. It was a horse-boat, but not capable of conveying the waggon, the contents of which must be unladen and shipped across in parcels, to be repacked in a cart that stood ready on the village quay. Leaving her men to handle this, Ruth crossed alone with her mare and rode on, as the ferryman directed her, past the village towards her lodging, some two miles up the stream. The house stood beside a more ancient ferry, now disused, to

which it had formerly served as a tavern. It rested on stout oaken piles driven deep into the river-mud; a notable building, with a roof like the inverted hull of a galleon, pierced with dormer windows and topped by a rusty vane. Its tenants were a childless couple—a Mr. and Mrs. Strongtharm: he a taciturn man of fifty, a born naturalist and great shooter of wildfowl; she a douce woman, with eyes like beads of jet, and an incurable propensity for mothering and spoiling her neighbours' children.

The couple received her kindly, asking a few questions. Their dwelling was by many sizes too large for them, and she might have taken her choice among a dozen of the old guest-chambers. But Sir Oliver had come and gone a month before and selected the best for her. Its roof-timbers, shaped like the ribs of a ship, curved outwards and downwards from a veritable keelson; and it was reached by way of a zig-zagging corridor, lit by port-holes, and adorned in every niche and corner with cases of stuffed wildfowl. Ruth supped well on game Mr. Strongtharm's gun had provided, and slept soundly, lulled between her dreams by the ripple of water swirling between the piles that supported, far below her, the house's cellarage.

She awoke at daybreak to the humming of wind; and looked forth on a leaden sky, on the river ruffled and clapping in small waves against a shrill north-easter, and on countless birds in flocks rising from the meadows

and balancing their wings against it. Before breakfast-time the weather had turned to heavy rain. But this mattered nothing; she had a day's work indoors before her.

She spent the morning in unpacking the stores, which had arrived late overnight from the ferry, and in putting a hundred small touches to her bedroom and sitting-room, to make them more habitable. By noon she had finished the unpacking, and dismissed the two grooms to make their way back to Boston and report that all was well with her. It rained until three in the afternoon; and then, the weather clearing, she saddled Madcap with her own hands and rode to the edge of the forest. Little light remained when she reached its outskirts, and she peered curiously between the dim boles for a few minutes before turning for her homeward ride. She had brought a beautiful scheme in her head, and the forest was concerned in it; but for the moment, in this twilight, the forest daunted her. She had—for she differed from most maidens—left her lover to arrange all the business of the marriage ceremony, stipulating only that it must be private. But she had at the same time bound him by a lover's oath that all details of the honeymoon must be left to her; that he should neither know where and how it was to be spent, nor seek to enquire. She would meet him at the church porch in the village below—in what garb, even, she would not promise; and after the ceremony he must be

ready to ride away with her—she would not promise whither.

Her project had been to build a camp far in the woods; and to this end she had made her many purchases in Port Nassau. They included, besides an array of provisions and cooking-pots, a hunter's tent such as the backwoodsmen used in their expeditions after beaver and moose. It weighed many pounds, and a part of her problem was how to convey it to any depth of the forest unaided.

The easterly gale blew itself out. The next morning broke with rifts of blue, and steadied itself, after two hours, to clear sunshine. She awoke in blithe spirits, and after breakfast went off without waste of time to saddle Madcap. By the stable door she found Mr. Strongtharm seated and polishing his gun, and paused to catechise him on the forest tracks, particularly on those leading up through Soldier's Gap—by which name he called the gorge at the head of the plain.

"The best track beyond, you'll find, lies pretty close 'longside the river," he said. "But 'tis no road for the mare. I doubt if a mule could manage it after the third mile. The river, you see, comes through in a monstrous hurry—by the look of it here you'd never guess. No, indeed, 'tisn't a river at all, properly speakin', but a whole heap o' streams tumblin' down this-a-way, that-a-way, out o' the side valleys; and what you may call the main river don't run in one body, but breaks itself

up considerable over waterfalls. Rock for the most part, an' pretty steep, with splashy ground below the falls. I han't been right up the Gap these dozen years; an' a man's job it is at the best—a two days' journey. The las' time I slept the night, goin' an' comin', in Peter Vanders' lodge."

"A lodge?"

"That's what they call it. He was a trapper, and a famous one, but before my time; an' that was his headquarters—a sort o' cabin, pretty stout, just by the head in the sixth fall, or maybe 'tis the seventh—I forget. He lived up there without wife or family—" Mr. Strongtharm would have launched into further particulars about the dead trapper, whose skill and strange habits had passed into a legend in the valley. But Ruth wished to hear more of the cabin.

"It's standin', no doubt, to this day. Vanders was a Dutchman, an' Dutchmen build strong by nature. The man who built *this* yer house was a Dutchman, an' look at the piles of it—*an'* the ribs you may ha' noticed. Ay, the lodge will be there yet; but you'll never find it, not unless I takes ye. That fourth fall is a teaser."

Ruth saddled her mare, and rode off in the direction of the Gap, thoughtfully. Mr. Strongtharm had given her a new notion. . . .

It was close upon nightfall when she returned. She was muddy, but cheerful; and she hummed a song

to herself in her chamber as she slid off her mired garments and attired herself for supper.

That song was her nesting song. Away Bostonwards, her lover, too, was building in his magnificent fashion; but Ruth had found a secret place, such as birds love, and shyly, stealthily as a mating bird, she set about planning and furnishing. It is woman's instinct. . . . Every day, as soon as breakfast was done, she saddled and rode towards the Gap, and always with a parcel or two dangling from the saddle-bow or strapped upon Madcap's back.

For the first time in her life she had money to handle; money furnished by Sir Oliver to be spent at her own disposal on the honeymoon. It seemed to her a prodigious sum, but she was none the less economical with it. I fear that sometimes she opened the bags and gloated over the coins as over a hoard. She was neither miser nor spendthrift; but unlike many girls brought up in poverty, she brought good husbandry to good fortune.

Yet "shopping"—to enter a store and choose among the goods for sale, having money to pay, but weighing quality and price—was undeniably pleasant. Twice or thrice, bethinking her of some trifle overlooked at Port Nassau, she enjoyed visiting the village store—it boasted but one—and dallying with a purchase.

She was riding back from one of these visits—it had

been (if the Muse will smile and condescend) to buy a packet of hairpins—when, half-way up the village street, she spied a horseman approaching. An instant later she recognised Mr. Trask.

There was really nothing strange in her meeting him here. Mr. Trask owned a herd of bullocks, and had ridden over from Port Nassau to bargain for their winter fodder. He had not aged a day. His horse was a tall grey, large-jointed, and ugly.

Ruth wore a veil, but it was wreathed just now above the brim of her hat. Her first impulse was to draw it over her face, and her hand went up; but she desisted in pride, and rode by her old enemy with a calm face.

They passed one another, and she believed that he had not recognised her; but after a few paces she heard him check his horse.

"Hi, madam!"

She halted, and he came slowly back.

"You are Ruth Josselin," he said.

"I am, sir."

"And what are you doing here?"

She smiled at him a little scornfully. "Do you ask as a magistrate, sir, or in curiosity?"

He frowned, narrowing his eyes. "You are marvellously changed. You appear prosperous. Has Vyell married you yet?"

"No, sir."

"Nor as yet cast you off, it would seem."

"No, sir."

"Ah, well, go your ways. You are a beautiful thing, but evil; and I would have saved ye from it. I whipped ye, remember."

Her face burned, but she held her eyes steady on him. "Mr. Trask," she said, "do you believe in hell?"

"Eh?" He was taken aback, but he could not frown away the question; for she asked it with a certain authority, albeit very courteously. "Eh? To be sure I do."

"I am going to prove to you (and some day you may take comfort from it) that, except on earth, there is no such place."

"Ye'd like to believe that, I daresay!"

"For you see," she went on, letting the sneer pass, "it is agreed that, if there be a hell, none but the wicked go there."

"Well?"

"Why, then, hell must defeat itself. For, where all are wicked together, no punishment can degrade, because no shame is felt."

"There's the pain, madam." He eyed her, and barked it in a short, savage laugh. "The torment—the worm that dies not, the fire that's not quenched. Won't these content ye, bating the shame?"

Her eyes answered his in scorn. "No, sir. Because I once suffered your cruelty, you have less understanding than I; but you have more ingenuity than the

Almighty, being able, in your district, to make a hell of earth."

"You blaspheme thus to me, that honestly tried to save your soul?"

"Did you? . . . Well, perhaps you did in your fashion, and you may take this comfort for reward. Believe me, who have tried, hell is bottomless, but in its own way. Should ever you attain to it—and there may in another world be such a place for the cruel—go down boldly; and it may be you will drop through into bliss."

"You, to talk of another world!" he snapped.

"And why not, Mr. Trask? Once upon a time you killed me."

He turned his grey horse impatiently. "I whipped ye," was his parting shot. "If 'tweren't too late, I'd take pleasure to whip ye again!"

CHAPTER IV

THE BRIDEGROOM

Mr. Trask had not concluded the bargain for his winter fodder. Just a week later he rode over from Port Nassau, to clinch it, and had almost reached the foot of the descent to the river meadows when a better mounted rider overtook him.

"Ah!" said the stranger, checking his horse's stride as he passed. "Good-morning, Mr. Trask! But possibly you do not remember me?"

"I remember you perfectly," answered Mr. Trask. "You are Sir Oliver Vyell."

"Whom, once on a time, you sentenced to the stocks. You recall our last conversation? Well, I bear you no malice; and, to prove it, will ask leave to ride to the ferry with you. You will oblige me? I like companionship, and my one fellow-traveller—a poor horseman—I have left some way behind on the road."

"I have no wish to ride with you, Sir Oliver," said Mr. Trask stiffly. "Forbye that I consider ye a son of Belial, I have a particular quarrel with you. At the time you condescend to mention, I took it upon me to give you some honest advice—not wholly for your own sake. You flouted it, and 'that's nothing to me' you'll

say; but every step we take worsens that very sin against which I warned ye, and therefore I want none of your company."

"Honest Mr. Trask," Sir Oliver answered with a laugh. "I put it to you that, having fallen in together thus agreeably, we shall make ourselves but a pair of fools if one rides ahead of the other in dudgeon. Add to this that the ferryman, spying us, will wait to tide us over together; and add also, if you will, that I have the better mount and it lies in my will that you shall neither lag behind nor outstrip me. Moreover, you are mistaken."

"I am not mistaken. This day week I met Ruth Josselin and had speech with her."

"Satisfactory, I hope?"

"It was not satisfactory; and if I must ride with you, Sir Oliver, you'll understand it to be under protest. You are a lewd man. You have taken this child——"

Here Mr. Trask choked upon speech. Recovering, he said the most unexpected thing in the world. "I am not as a rule a judge of good looks; and no doubt 'tis unreason in me to pity her the more for her comeliness. But as a matter of fact I do."

Sir Oliver stared at him. "*You* to pity her! *You* to plead her beauty to me, who took it out of the mud where you had flung her, mauled by you and left to lie like a bloody clout!"

But the armour of Mr. Trask's self-righteousness was

not pierced. "I sentenced her," he replied calmly, "for her soul's welfare. Who said—what right have you to assume—that she would have been left to lie there? Rather, did I not promise you in the market-square that, her chastening over, my cart should fetch her? Did I not keep my word? And could you not read in the action some earnest that the girl would be looked after? Your atheism, sir, makes you dull in spiritual understanding."

"I am glad that it does, sir."

"If your passion for Ruth Josselin held an ounce of honesty, you would not be glad; for even in this world you have ruined her."

"Mr. Trask, I have not."

Mr. Trask glanced at him quickly.

"—Upon my honour as a gentleman I have not, neither do I desire it. . . . Sir, twice in this half-mile you have prompted me to ask, What, here on this meadow, prevents my killing you? Wait; I know your answer. You are a courageous man and would say that as a magistrate you have schooled yourself to accept risks and to despise threats. Yes," Sir Oliver admitted with a laugh, "you are an infernally hard nut to crack, and somehow I cannot help liking you for it. Are you spending the night yonder, by-the-bye?" He nodded towards the village.

"No, sir. I purpose returning this evening to Port Nassau."

"Then it is idle to invite you to my wedding. I am to be married at nine o'clock to-morrow."

Mr. Trask eyed him for a moment or two. Then his gaze wandered ahead to the river, where already the ferrymen had caught sight of them and were pushing the horse-boat across with long sweeps; and beyond the river to a small wooden-spired church, roofed with mossy shingles that even at this distance showed green in the slant sunlight.

"Yonder?" he asked.

"Ay: you would have been welcome."

"I will attend," said Mr. Trask. "A friend of mine—a farmer—will lodge me for the night. A hospitable man, who has made the offer a score of times. After as many refusals I am glad of an excuse for accepting."

"I stipulate that you keep the excuse a secret from him. It is to be quite private. That," said Sir Oliver, turning in saddle for a look behind him, "is one of my reasons for outriding my fellow-traveller."

"The clergyman?"

"Ay. . . . To-morrow, maybe, you'll admit to having misjudged us."

"Maybe," Mr. Trask conceded. "I shall at any rate thank God, provisionally. He is merciful. But I have difficulty in believing that any good can come of it."

CHAPTER V

RUTH'S WEDDING DAY

SHE had left it all to him, receiving his instructions by letter. It was to be quite private, as he had told Mr. Trask. She would ride down to the village in her customary grey habit, as though on an early errand of shopping. He would lodge overnight at the Ferry Inn, and be awaiting her by the chancel rails. Afterwards—ah, that was her secret! In this, their first step in married life, he had promised—reversing the marriage vow—to obey.

Happiness bubbled within her like a spring; overshadowed by a little awe, but not to be held down. Almost at the last moment she must take Mrs. Strongtharm into her confidence. She could not help it.

"Granny," she whispered. (They were great friends.) "I am to be married to-morrow."

"Sakes!" exclaimed Mrs. Strongtharm, peering at her, misdoubting that she jested.

But Ruth's face told its own tale. "May I?" asked the elder woman, and her arm went about the girl's waist. "God bless ye, dear, and send ye a long family!

Who's the gentleman? Not him as came an' took the rooms for ye? He said you was a near relation o' his. . . . Well, never mind! The trick's as old as Abram."

"Be down at the church at nine to-morrow, and you shall see him, whoever he is. But it is a secret, and you are not to tell Mr. Strongtharm."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Strongtharm. "*Him!*"

"But you ought to make *some* difference," whispered the good woman next morning, after breakfast, as she was preparing to slip away to the village. "Be it but a flower in your bodice. But we've no garden, and the season's late."

Ruth took her kiss of benediction. She was scarcely listening; but the words by a strange trick repeated themselves on her brain a few minutes later, upstairs, as she went about her last preparations.

She leaned out at the lattice over the river. A lusty creeper, rooted in *terra firma* at the back of the house, had pushed its embrace over west side and front. The leaves, green the summer through, were now turned to a vivid flame-colour. She plucked three or four and pinned them over her bosom, glanced at the effect in the mirror, and went quickly down the stairs.

Fairer day could hardly have been chosen. "Happy is the bride the sun shines on." . . . In the sunshine by the stable door Mr. Strongtharm sat polishing his

gun. She asked him what sport he would be after to-day.

He answered, "None. I don't reckon 'pon luck, fishing, after a body's mentioned rabbits; and I don't go gunning if I've seen a parson. A new parson, I mean. Th' old Minister's all in the day's work."

"You have seen a strange clergyman to-day?"

"Yes; as I pulled home past the Ferry. I'd been down-stream early, tryin' for eels. On my way back I saw him—over my left shoulder too. He was comin' out o' the Inn by the waterside door, wipin' his mouth —a loose-featured man, with one shoulder higher than t'other, and a hard drinker by his looks."

Ruth saddled-up and mounted in silence. Fatally she recognised the old fellow's description; but—was it possible her lover had brought this man to marry them?—this man, whose touch was defilement, to join their hands? If the precisians of Port Nassau had made religion her tragedy, this man had come in, by an afterblow, to turn it into a blasphemous farce. If Ruth had lost Faith, she yet desired good thoughts, to have everything about her pure and holy—and on this day, of all days!

Surely Oliver—she had taught herself to call him Oliver—would never misunderstand her so! Why, it was a misunderstanding that went down, down, almost to the roots. *Those whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder* . . . but here was cleavage, and

from within. Say rather of such sundering, What man could remedy it? *Those whom God hath joined together*—ah, by such hands!

It was not possible. In all things her lover had shown himself considerate, tender; guessing, preventing her smallest wish. As she rode she sought back once more to the wellspring of love. Had he not stooped to her as a god, lifted her from the mire? It was not possible.

Yet, as she rode, the unconquerable common sense within her kept whispering that this thing *was* possible. . . . It darkened the sunlight. She rode as one who, having sung carelessly for miles, surmises a dreadful leap close ahead. Still she rode on, less and less sure of herself, and came to the church porch, and alighted.

The church was a plain oblong building, homely within to the last degree. The pews were of pitch-pine, the walls and rafters coated with whitewash, some of which had peeled off and lay strewing the floor. A smell of oil filled the air; it was sweet and sickly, and came from the oozings of half a dozen untended lamps. Ornament the place had none, save a decent damask cloth on the Communion table.

Oliver Vyell stood by the chancel rail. The rest of the congregation comprised Mr. Trask, seated stiff and solitary in the largest pew, Mrs. Strongtharm, and half a score of children whom Mrs. Strongtharm had

collected on the way and against her will. They followed her by habit, after goodies; but just now, though they sat quiet, her reputation was suffering from a transient distrust. (Allurements to piety rarely fell in the path of a New England child; but even he was child enough to suspect them when they occurred.) At the sound of the mare's footsteps they turned their heads, one and all. Mr. Silk, clad in white surplice and nervously turning the pages of the Office by the holy table, faced about also.

Ruth was seen alighting, out there in the sunlight. She hitched the mare's bridle over a staple and came lightly stepping through the shadow of the porchway. Her lover walked down the aisle to meet her. He, too, stepped briskly, courteously.

Three paces within the doorway she came to a halt. The sunlight fell on her again, through the first of the southern windows. It flamed on the leaves pinned to her bosom.

He offered his arm. But she, that had come stepping like a wild fawn, like a fawn stood at gaze, terrified, staring past him at the figure by the table. Mr. Silk commanded an oily smile and, book in hand, advanced to the chancel step.

"Ah, no!" she murmured. "It is wicked——"

She cast her eyes around, as though for help. They did not turn—it was pitifullest of all—to him who was

about to swear to help her throughout life. They turned and encountered Mr. Trask's.

With a sob, as Sir Oliver would have taken her arm, she threw it up, broke from him, and fled back through the porchway. As she drew back that one pace before fleeing, the sun fell full again on that breast-knot of scarlet leaves.

He stared after her dumbfoundered, still doubting her intent. He saw her catch at the mare's bridle, and, with a bitter curse, ran forward. But he was too late. She had mounted, and was away.

He heard the mare's hoofs clattering up the street. His own horse was stabled at the Ferry Inn. It would cost him ten minutes at least to mount and pursue. . . .

"I said 'provisionally.'" It was Mr. Trask's voice, speaking at his elbow. "Nay, man, don't strike me; since you meant business, 'tis yourself you should strike for a fool. You were a fool to invite me; but she was scared before ever she caught sight of *me*—by that buck-parson of yours, I guess."

He had fetched Bayard, had mounted, and was after her. He pulled rein at her lodgings. Yes, Mr. Strongtharm had seen her go by. The old fellow did not guess what was amiss, as how should he? "It's cruel for the mare's hoofs," he commented, "forcing her that pace on the hard road. She rides well, s' far

as ridin' goes; but the best womankind on horseback has neither bowels nor understandin'."

He pointed towards Soldiers' Gap. "She rides there most days," he said; "but it can't be far. There's no Christian road for a horse, once you're past the second fall."

Oliver Vyell struck spur and followed. Already he had the decency to curse himself, but not yet could he understand his transgressing.

"Your atheism"—Mr. Trask had said it—"makes you dull in spiritual understanding."

Sceptics are of two orders, and religious disputants gain a potential advantage, but miss truth, by confusing them. Oliver Vyell was dull, and his dullness had betrayed him, precisely because his reason was so lucid and logical that it shut out those half-tones in which abide all men's, all women's, tenderest feelings. He knew that Ruth had no more faith than he in Christian dogma; no faith at all in what a minister's intervention could do to sanctify marriage. He had inferred that she must consider the tying of the knot by Mr. Silk, if not as a fair jest, at least as a gentle mockery, the humour of which he and she would afterwards taste together. Why had she not pleaded against rite of any kind? . . . Besides, the dog had once insulted her with a proposal. Sir Oliver never allowed Mr. Silk to guess that he had surprised his secret; and

Mr. Silk, tortuous himself in all ways, could not begin to be on terms with a candid soul such as Ruth's, craving in all things to be open where it loves. Sir Oliver had supposed it a pretty lesson to put on a calm, negligent face, and command the parson, who dared not disobey, to perform the ceremony. Mr. Silk had cringed.

Likewise, when inviting Mr. Trask to the nuptials, he had looked on him but as a witness to his triumph. The very man who had sentenced her to degradation—was there not dramatic triumph in summoning him to behold her exalted?

For behind all this reasoning, of course, and below all his real passion for her, lay the poisonous, proud, Whig sense of superiority, the conviction that, desirable though she was, his choice exalted her. Would not ten thousand women—would not a hundred thousand—have counted it heaven to stand in her place?

Yet she had earnestly begged off the rite which to every one of these women would have meant everything. This puzzled him.

On second thoughts the puzzle had dissolved. She accepted his negations, and, woman-like, improved on them. The marriage service was humbug; therefore she had willed to have none of it. The attitude was touching. It might have been convenient, had he been less in love.

But he was deeply in love, so deeply that in good

earnest he longed to lift and set her above all women. For this, nonsensical though they were, due rites must be observed.

At the last pinch she had broken away. Was it possible, then, that after all she did not love him? She had crossed her arms once and called herself his slave. . . .

Not for one moment did he understand that other scepticism which, forced out of faith, clasps and clings to reverence; which, though it count the rite inefficient, yet sees the meaning, and counts the moment so holy that to contaminate the rite is to poison all.

Not as yet did he understand one whit of this. But he vehemently desired her, and his desire was straight. Because it was straight, while he rode, some inkling of the truth pierced him.

For, as he rode, he recalled how she had cast up an arm and turned to flee. His eyes had rested confusedly on the breast-knot of scarlet leaves, and it seemed to him, as he rode, that he had seen her heart beating there through her ribs.

CHAPTER VI

"YET HE WILL COME—"

THE cabin stood close above the fall. It was built of oak logs split in two, with the barked and rounded sides turned outward. Pete Vanders would have found pine logs more tractable and handier to come by, and they would have outlasted his time; but, being a Dutchman, he had built solidly by instinct.

Also, he had chosen his ledge cunningly or else with amazing luck. A stairway shaped in the solid rock—eight treads and no more—led down to the very brink of the first cascade; yet through all these years, with their freshets and floods, the cabin had clung to its perch. Within doors the ears never lost the drone of the waters. There were top-notes that lifted or sank as the wind blew, but below them the deep bass thundered on.

Ruth had doffed her riding-dress for a bodice and short skirt of russet, and moved about the cabin tidying where she had tidied a score of times already. Through the window-opening drifted wisps of smoke, aromatic and pungent, from the fire she had built in an angle of the crags a few yards from the house.

(It had been the Dutchman's hearth. She had found it and cleared the creepers away, and below them the rock-face was yet black with the smoke of old fires.) Some way up the gorge, where, at the foot of a smaller waterfall, the river divided and swirled about an island covered with sweet grass—a miniature meadow—her mare grazed at will. About a fortnight ago, having set aside three days for the search, on the second Ruth had found a circuitous way through the woods. A part of it she had cleared with a billhook, and since then Madcap had trodden a rough pathway with her frequent goings and comings. It had immensely lightened the labour of furnishing, but she feared that the pasturage would last but a day or two. Her lover, when he came, must devise means of sending the mare back.

She never doubted his coming. He would probably miss the bridle-path, the opening of which she had carefully hidden, and be forced to make the ascent on foot. But he would come. See, she was laying out his clothes for him! He had sent to Sweetwater, at her request, two valises full, packed by Manasseh; and she had conveyed them hither with the rest of the furniture. Carefully now she made her selection from the store: coat, breeches of homespun and leather, stout boots, moccasined leggings such as the Indians wore, woollen shirts—but other shirts also of finest cambric—with underclothes of silk, and delicate night-

shirts, and silken stockings that could be drawn like soft ribbons between the fingers. She thrilled as she handled them garment by garment. Along the wall hung his two guns, with shot-bag and powder-flask.

Here was his home. Here were his clothes. . . . She had forgiven him, hours ago, without necessity for his pleading. So would he forgive her. After all, what store did he set by church ceremony? He had vowed to her a dozen times that he set none. He loved her; that was enough, and assurance of his following. He would confess that she had been right. . . . As she moved about, touching, smoothing this garment and that, there crossed her memory the Virgilian refrain—

"Nihil ille deos, nil carmina curat.
Ducite ab urba domum, mea carmina, ducite Daphnin."

She murmured it, smiling to herself as she recalled also the dour figure of Mr. Hichens in the library at Sabines, seated stiffly, listening while she construed. If only tutors guessed what they taught!

She hummed the lines: *"Nihil ille deos"*—he cared nothing for church rites; *"nil carmina"*—she needed no incantations.

She never doubted that he would arrive; but, as the day wore on, she told herself that very likely he had missed his road. He would arrive hungered, in any event. . . . She stepped out to the cooking-pot, and,

on her way, paused for a long look down the glen. The sun, streaming its rays over the high pines behind her, made rainbows in the spray of the fall and cast her shadow far over the hollow at her feet. The water, plunging past her, shot down the valley in three separate cascades, lined with slippery rock, in the crevices of which many ferns had lodged and grew, waving in the incessantly shaken air. From the pool into which the last cascade tumbled—a stone dislodged by her foot dropped to it almost plumb—the stream hurtled down the glen, following the curve of its sides until they overlapped; naked cliffs above, touched with sunlight, their feet set in peat, up which the forest trees clambered as if in a race for the top—pines leading, with heather and scrubby junipers, oaks and hemlocks some way behind; alders, mostly by the waterside, with maples in swampy patches, and here and there a birch waving silver against the shadow. The pines kept their funereal plumes, like undertakers who had made a truce with death by making a business of it. But these deciduous trees, that had rioted in green through spring and summer, wrapped themselves in robes to die, the thinner the more royal; the maples in scarlet, the swamp-oak in purple—bloody purple where the sun smote on its upper boughs. Already the robes had worn thin, and their ribs showed. Leaves strewed the flat rock where Ruth stood, looking down.

She was not thinking of the leaves, nor of the fall of

the year. She was thinking that her lord would be hungered. She went back to her cooking-pot under the cliff overhung with heath and juniper.

Herself fearless—or less fearful than other women—she did not for some time let her mind run on possible accidents to him. He was a man, and would arrive, though tired and hungered. Not until the sun sank behind the upper pines did any sense of her own loneliness assail her. Then she bethought her that with night, if he delayed, the forest would wrap her around, formless, haunted by wild beasts. The singing of birds, never in daylight utterly drowned by the roar of the fall, had ceased about her; the call of the hidden chickadees, the cheep-cheep of a friendly robin, hopping in near range of the cooking-pot, the sawing of busy chipmonks.

These sounds had ceased; but she did not feel the silence until, far up the valley behind her, a loon sent forth its sole unhappy cry. It rang a moment between the cliffs. As it died away she felt how friendly had been these casual voices, and wondered what beasts the forest might hold.

She went back to the cabin, lit a lamp, and lifted one of the guns off its rack. She charged it—well she had learnt how to charge a gun.

Twilight was falling. The fire burned beneath the cooking-pot; but, seated on the flat stone with the gun laid across her knees and the fall sounding beneath her,

she had another thought—that the fire, set in an angle of the rock, and moreover hidden around the house's corner—was but a poor signal. It shed no ray down the glen.

She would light another fire on the flat stone. In the dusk she collected dry twigs, piled stouter sticks above them, covered the whole with leaves, and lit it, fetching a live brand from under the cooking-pot. The flame leapt up, danced over the leaves, died down and again revived. When assured that it was caught, she sat beside it, staring across the flame over the valley now swallowed in darkness, still with the gun laid across her knees.

"Ruth! O Ruth!"

His voice came up over the roar of the fall—which, while he stumbled among the boulders below, had drowned his footsteps.

"Dear! Ah—have a care!"

"Yes; hold a light. . . . It must be dangerous here."

She snatched a brand from the fire. She had collected a fresh heap of twigs and leaves in the lap of her gown, groping in the dusk for them; and his first sight of her had been as she stood high emptying them in a red stream to feed the flames. A witch she seemed, pouring sacrifice on that wild altar, while the light of it danced upon her face and figure. Having gained the ledge of the second cascade, he anchored himself on

good foothold and stared up, catching breath before he hailed.

Her first glimpse of him, as she held the blazing stick over the edge of the fall, was of a face damp with sweat or with spray, and of his hands reaching up the slimed rock, feeling for a grip.

"Ah, be careful! Shall I come down to you?" For the first time she realised his peril.

"*Over rocks that are steepest,*" he quoted gaily, between grunts of hard breathing. He had handhold now. "Hero on her tower—and 'faith, Leander came near to swimming for it—once or twice" (grunt) "*Over the mountains, And over the waves*—hullo! that rock of yours overhangs. What's to the left?" (grunt) "Grass? I mistrust grass on these ledges. . . . Reach down your hand, dear Ruth, to steady me only. . . ."

She flung herself prone on the flat rock beside the fire, and gave a hand to him. He caught it, heaved himself over the ledge with a final grunt of triumph, and dropped beside her, panting and laughing.

"You might have killed yourself!" she shivered.

"And whom, then, would you have reproached?"

"You might have killed yourself—and then—and then I think I should have died too."

"Ruth!"

"My lord will be hungry. He shall rest here and eat."

He flung a glance towards the cabin; or rather—for

the dusk hid its outlines—towards the light that shone cosily through the window-hatch.

"Not yet!" she murmured. "My lord shall rest here for a while." She was kneeling now to draw off his shoes. He drew away his foot, protesting.

"Child, I am not so tired, but out of breath, and—yes—hungry as a hunter."

"My lord will remember. It was the first service I ever did for him." It may have been an innocent wile to anchor him fast there and helpless. . . . At any rate she knelt, and drew off his shoes and carried them to a little distance. "Next, my lord shall eat," she said; and having rinsed her hands in the stream and spread them a moment to the flame to dry, sped off to the cabin.

In a minute she was back with glasses and clean napkins, knives, forks, spoons, and a bottle of wine; from a second visit she returned with plates, condiments, and a dish of fruit. Then, running to the cooking-pot, she fetched soup in two bowls. "And after that," she promised, "there will be partridges. Mr. Strongtharm shot them for me, for I was too busy. They are turning by the fire on a jack my mother taught me to make out of threads that untwist and twist again. . . . Shall I sit here, at my lord's feet?"

"Sit where you will, but close; and kiss me first. You have not kissed me yet—and it is our wedding day. Our wedding feast! O Ruth—Ruth, my love!"

"Our wedding feast! . . . Could it be better! O my dear, dear lord! . . . But I'll not kiss you yet."

"Why, Ruth?"

"Why, sir, because I will not—and that's a woman's reason. Afterwards—but not now! You boasted of your hunger. What has become of it?"

They ate for a while in silence. The stream roared at their feet. Above them, in the gap of the hills, Jupiter already blazed, and as the last of the light faded, star after star came out to keep him company.

He praised her roasting of the partridges. "To-morrow," she answered, "you shall take your gun and get me game. We must be good providers. To-morrow——"

"To-morrow—and for ever and ever—" He poured wine and drank it slowly.

"Ah, look up at the heavens! And we two alone. Is this not best, after all? Was I not right?"

"Perhaps," he answered after a pause. "It is good, at all events."

"To-morrow we will explore; and when this place tires us—but my lord has not praised it yet——"

"Must I make speeches?"

"No. When this place tires us, we will strike camp and travel up through the pass. It may be we shall find boatmen on the upper waters, and a canoe. But for some days, O my love, let these only woods be enough for us!"

Their dessert of fruit eaten, she arose and turned to the business of washing-up. He would have helped; but she mocked him, having hidden his shoes. "You are to rest quiet, and obey!"

Before setting to work she brought him coffee and a roll of tobacco-leaf, and held a burning stick for him while he lit and inhaled.

For twenty minutes, perhaps, he watched her, stretched on the rock, resting on his elbow, his hunger appeased, his whole frame fatigued, but in a delicious weariness, as in a dream.

Far down the valley the full moon thrust a rim above the massed oaks and hemlocks. It swam clear, and he called to her to come and watch it.

She did not answer. She had slipped away to the house—as he supposed to restore the plates to their shelves. Apparently it took her a long while. . . . He called again to her.

The curtain of the doorway was lifted and she stood on the threshold, all in white, fronting the moon.

"Will my lord come into his house?"

Her voice thrilled down to him. . . . Then she remembered that he stood there shoeless; and, giving a little cry, would have run barefoot down the moonlit rocky steps, preventing him.

But he had sprung to his unshod feet, and with a cry rushed up to her, disregarding the thorns.

She sank, crossing her arms as a slave—in homage, or, it may be, to protect her maiden breasts.

"No, no—" she murmured, sliding low within his arms. "Look first around, if our house be worthy!"

But he caught her up, and lifting her, crushing her body to his, carried her into the hut.

CHAPTER VII

HOUSEKEEPING

SHE awoke at daybreak to the twittering of birds. Raising herself little by little, she bent over him, studying the face of her beloved. He slept on; and after a while she slipped from the couch, collected her garments in a bundle, tiptoed to the door, and lifting its curtain, stole out to the dawn.

Mist filled the valley below the fall. A purple bank of vapour blocked the end of it. But the rolling outline was edged already with gold, and already ray upon ray of gold shivered across the upper sky and touched the pinewoods at the head of the pass.

Clad in cloak and night-rail, shod in loose slippers of Indian leather-work, she moved across to the fire she had banked overnight. Beside it a bold robin had perched on the rim of the cooking-pot. He fluttered up to a bough, and thence watched her warily. She remade the fire, building a cone of twigs; fetched water, scoured the cauldron, and hung it again on its bar. As she lifted it the sunlight glinted on the ring her lover had brought for the wedding and had slipped on her finger in the cabin, binding her by this only rite.

The fire revived and crackled cheerfully. She caught up the bundle again and climbed beside the stream, following its right bank until she came to the pool of her choice. There, casting all garments aside, she went down to it, and the alders hid her.

Half an hour later she returned and paused on the threshold of the hut, the sunlight behind her. In her arms she carried a cluster—a bundle almost—of ferns and autumnal branches—cedar and black-alder, the one berried with blue the other with coral, maple and aromatic spruce, with trails of the grape vine. He was awake and lay facing the door half-raised on his left elbow.

"This for good-morning!" She held out the armful to show him, but so that it hid her face from him. Then, dropping the cluster on the floor, she ran and knelt, bowing her face upon the couch beside him. But laying a palm against either temple he forced her to lift it and gaze at him, mastering the lovely blush.

He looked long into her eyes. "You are very beautiful," he said slowly.

She sprang to her feet. "See the dew on my shoes! I have bathed, and—" with a gesture of the hand towards the scattered boughs—"afterwards I pulled these for you. But I was in haste and late because—because—" She explained that while bathing she had let the ring, which was loose and heavy, slip from her finger into the pool. It had lodged endwise between two pebbles,

and she had taken some minutes to find it. "As for these," she said, "the flowers are all done, but I like the leaves better. In summer our housekeeping might have been make-believe; now, with the frosts upon us, we shall have hard work, and a fire to give thanks for."

He slid from the couch and, standing erect, threw a bath-gown over his shoulders. "I must build a chimney," he said, looking around; "a chimney and a stone hearth."

"Then our house will be perfect."

"I will start this very day. . . . Show me the way to your pool."

They ate their breakfast on the stone above the fall, in the warm sunshine, planning and talking together like children. He would build the chimney; but first he must climb down to the lower valley and find Bayard, deserted at the foot of the falls, and left to wander all night at will.

He must take the mare, too, she said; and promised to start him on the bridle-path, so that he could not miss it.

"What! Must I ride on a side-saddle?"

"It should be easy for you," she laughed. "You pretended to know all about it when you taught me." In the end it was settled that she should ride and he walk beside till Bayard was found. "Then you can lead her back and leave her with Mr. Strongtharm."

"But I shall need Bayard to bring home a sack of lime for my mortar. And you are over thoughtful for Madcap. I walked up to inspect the pasture, and there is enough to last the pair for a week. It is odds, too, we find some burnt lands at the back of these woods, with patches of good grass. Let us keep the horses up here, at any rate until the nights turn colder. A taste of hard faring will be good for their pampered flesh, as for mine. Besides—though you may not know it—I am a first-class groom."

"As well as a mason? You will have to turn hunter, too, before long, else your cook will be out of work. Dear, dear, how we begin to crowd the days!"

For a whole week he worked at intervals, building his chimney with stones from the river bed, and laying them well and truly. Ruth helped him at whiles, when household duties did not claim her. Now and then, when his back ached with the toil, he would break off for a spell and watch her as she stooped over the cooking-pot, or knelt by the stream-side, bare-legged, with petticoat kilted high, beating the linen on a flat stone.

When the chimney was finished they were in great anxiety lest, being built close under the cliff, it should catch a down-draught of the wind and fill the dwelling with smoke. But the wind came, and, as it turned

out, made a leap from the cliff to the valley, singing high overhead and missing the chimney clear. When they lit their first fire indoors and ran forth to see the smoke rising in a thin blue pillar against the pines, they laughed elated, and at supper drank to their handiwork.

Ruth's first sacrifice on the new hearth was the solemn heating of a flat iron, to crimp and pleat her lover's body-linen.

Next day he shot a deer and skinned it; and, the next, set to work to build a bed. Their couch had been of white linen laid upon skins, the skins resting on a thick mat of leaves. Now he raised it from the ground on four posts, joining the posts with a stout framework and lacing the framework with cords criss-crossed like the netting of a hammock. Also he replaced the curtain at the entrance with a door of split pinewood, and fashioned a wooden bolt.

The halcyon weather held for two weeks, the delicate weather of Indian summer. Day by day the forest dropped its leaves under a blue windless sky, but the nights sharpened their frosts. Ruth, stealing early to her bathing-pool, found it edged with thin ice, and paused, breaking it with taps of her naked foot while she braced her body for the cold shock.

The flat rock over the fall was still their supper-table. After supping they would wrap themselves closer in their cloaks of bearskin, and sit for long,

his arm about her body. The stars wheeled overhead. At a little distance shone the open window inviting them. From their ledge they overlooked the world.

She marvelled at the zest he threw into every moment and detail of this strange honeymooning. He had taken pride even in skinning and cutting up the slain deer.

She had, in fact, been fearful of her experiment; had planned it, in some sort, as a test for him. She was no sentimentalist. She had believed that he loved her—well she knew it now. But for him this could not be first love. Many times she had bethought her of the dead Margaret Dance, and as a sensible girl without resentment. But, herself in the ecstasy of first love, she marvelled how it could die, and anything comparable spring up in its place; and she had only her own heart to interrogate. Her own heart told her that it was impossible. "Fool!" said her own heart. "Is it not enough that he condescends—that you have found favour in his sight—you, that asked but to be his slave?"

"Fool!" said her heart again. "Would you be jealous of this dead woman? Then jealousy is not cruel as the grave, but crueller."

And she retorted, "The woman is dead and cannot grudge it. Ah, conscience! are you the only part of

me that has not slept in his arms? I want him all—all!"

"How can that be—since you are not his first love?" objected conscience, falling back upon its old position.

"Be still," she whispered back. "See how love is recreating him!"

Indeed, the secret may have laid in her passing loveliness—by night, beside their fire on the rock, he would sit motionless watching her face for minutes together, or the poise of her head, or the curve of her chin as she tilted it, to ponder the stars; and, in part, the woodland life, chosen by her so cunningly, may have bewitched him for a space. Certain it is that during their sojourn here he became a youth again, eager and glad as a youth, passionate as a youth, laughing, throwing his heart into simple things and not shrinking from coarser trials—as when he plunged his hands into the blood of the deer.

This story is of Ruth, not of Oliver Vyell; or of him only in so far as his star ruled hers. For the moment their stars danced together and the common cares of this world stood back for a space and left a floor for them.

Their bliss was absolute. But the seed of its corruption lay in him. Her spirit was chaste, as her life had been. For him, before ever Margaret Dance met and crossed his path, he had lived loosely, squander-

ing his manhood; and of this squandering let one who later underwent it record the inevitable sentence.

> "But ah! it hardens all within,
> And petrifies the feeling."

Nor could this temporary miracle do more for Oliver Vyell than wake in him a false springtide of the heart and delay by so long the revenge of his past upon his present self.

Midway in the third week the weather broke. He had foreseen this, and early one morning set forth upon Bayard, the mare following obediently as a dog, along the downhill circuit to the village. There he would leave them in stall at the Ferry Inn, to be fetched by his grooms. Ruth walked some way beside him, telling off a list of purchases to be made at the village store to replenish their household stock.

She left him and turned back, under boughs too bare to hide the lowering sky. She had gained the hut and he the village before the storm broke. Indeed it gave him time to make his purchases and reach the Inn, where a heavy mail-bag awaited him. He was served with bread, cheese, and beer in the Inn parlour, and dealt with the letters then and there; answering some, tearing up others, albeit still with a sense of bringing back his habits of business to a world with which he had no concern. While he wrote, always in haste, on

the cheap paper the Inn supplied, the storm broke and with such darkness that he pulled out his watch. It was yet early afternoon. He called for candles and wrote on.

The last letter, addressed to Batty Langton, Esquire, he superscribed "*Most urgent*," and having sealed it, arose and shouldered his sack for the homeward tramp. By this time the wind howled through the village street, blowing squall upon squall of rain before it. It blew too dead in his path, but he faced it cheerfully.

Before he gained what should have been the shelter of the woods, the gale had increased so that they gave less than the road had given. The trees rocked above him; leaves and dead twigs beat on his face, and at last the blast forced him almost to creep on all fours. It was dark, too, beneath the swaying boughs. But uppermost in his mind was fear for his love, lest the hut should have given way before the tempest, and she be lying crushed beneath it.

Still he fought his way. Darkness—the real darkness—was falling, and he was yet a mile from the hut when in his path a figure arose from the undergrowth where it had been crouching.

"Ruth!"

"Ah, you are safe! . . . I could not rest at home——"

They took hands and forced their way against the wind.

"The cabin?"

"It stands, please God!"

After much battling they spied the light shining through the louvers of its closed shutter. The gale streamed down the valley as through a funnel, but once past the angle of the cliff they found themselves almost in a calm. He pushed the door open.

On the hearth—the hearth of his building—a pile of logs burned cheerfully. Over these the kettle hissed; and the firelight fell on their bed, with its linen oversheet turned back and neatly folded.

She entered and he closed the door behind her. She laughed as he pushed its bolt. They were drenched to the skin, the pair.

"This is best," said she with another soft and happy laugh.

"This is best," he repeated after her. "Better even than in fair weather."

CHAPTER VIII

HOME-COMING

A WEEK later they broke camp and set forth to climb to the head of the pass.

Behind it—so Sir Oliver had learnt from old Strongtharm—lay an almost flat table-land, of pine-forest for the most part, through which for maybe half a dozen miles their river ran roughly parallel with another that came down from the north-west. At one point (the old fellow declared) less than a mile divided their waters.

"Seems," he said, "as if Nature all along intended 'em to jine, and then, at the last moment, changed her mind." He explained the cause of their severance —an outcropping ridge of rock, not above a mile in length; but it served, deflecting the one stream to the southward, the other to north of east, so that they reached the ocean a good twenty leagues apart.

He showed a map and told Sir Oliver further that at the narrowest point between the two rivers there dwelt a couple of brothers, Dave and Andy M'Lauchlin, with their households and long families, of whom all the boys were expert log drivers, like their fathers.

They were likewise expert boatmen, and for money, no doubt, if Sir Oliver desired, would navigate the upper reaches of either stream for him. Of these reaches the old man could tell little save that their currents ran moderately—"nothing out of the way." The M'Lauchlins sent all their timber down to sea by the more northerly stream. "Our river 'd be the better by far, three-fourths of its way, but—" with a jerk of his thumb—"the Gap, yonder, makes it foolishness."

Sir Oliver asked many questions, studying the map; and ended by borrowing it.

He had it spread on his knee when Ruth came out of the cabin for the last time, having said farewell to her household gods.

"What are you reading?" she asked.

"A map." He folded it away hastily.

"And I am not to see it?"

"Some day. Some day, if the owner will sell, you shall have it framed, with our travels marked out upon it. But, just now, it holds a small secret."

She questioned him no further. "Come," she said, "reach your arm in at the window and draw the bolt, and afterwards we will pull the shutter and nail it. Are you going inside for a last look around?"

He laughed. "Why? The knapsacks are here, ready."

"Our home!"

"I take the soul of it with me, taking you."

It was prettily said. Yet perversely she remembered how he had once spoken of Margaret Dance, saying, "Let the dead bury their dead."

The sky, after six angry days—two sullen, four tempestuous—was clear again and promised another stretch of fair weather. This was important, for they counted on having to sleep a night in the open before reaching the M'Lauchlins' camp. Old Strongtharm had told Sir Oliver of a cave at the head of the pass and directed him how to find it. Should the sky's promise prove false, they would descend back to the hut. Snow was their one serious peril.

They carried but the barest necessaries; for although the worst of the falls lay below and behind them, the upper part of the Gap was arduous enough, and the more difficult for being unknown; also Sir Oliver had old Strongtharm's assurance that the M'Lauchlins would furnish them with all things requisite for voyaging by water.

Sir Oliver climbed in silence. He was flinging a bridge, albeit a short one, across the unknown, and the risk of it weighed on him. For himself this would have counted nothing, but he was learning the lesson common to all male animals whose mates for the first time travel beside them. As for Ruth, it was wonder-

ful—the course of the path once turned, the small home left out of sight—how securely she breasted the upward path. Her lover and she were as gods walking, treading the roof of the world.

Through thickets they climbed, and by stairways beside the singing falls. In a pool below one of these falls they surprised a great loon that had resorted here to live solitary through his moulting-season. He rose and winged away with a cry like an inhuman laugh; and they recognised a sound which had often been borne down the gorge—once or twice at night, to awake and puzzle them.

They came to the uppermost fall a good hour before sunset, and after a little search Sir Oliver found the cave. They could have pushed on, but decided to sleep here: and they slept soundly, being in truth more weary than their spirits, exhilarated in the high air, allowed them to guess.

They might, as it turned out, by forcing the march, have found the M'Lauchlins' settlement before dusk. For scarcely had they travelled five miles next morning before they came on an outpost of it: a large hut, half dwelling-house, half boat-shed. It stood in a clearing on the left shore, and close by the water's edge was a young man, patching the bottom of an up-turned canoe. Two children—a boy and a girl—had dropped their play to watch him. A flat-bottomed boat lay moored to the bank, close by.

The children, catching sight of our travellers, must have uttered some exclamation; for the young man turned quickly, and after a brief look called "Good-morning." There was a ford (he shouted) fifty yards up-stream; but no need to wade. Let them wait a minute and he would fetch them.

He laid down his tools, unmoored the flat-bottomed boat, and poled across. On the way back he told them he was Adam M'Lauchlin, son of David. The little ones were children of his father by a second wife; but he had seven brothers and sisters of his own. . . . Yes, their settlement stood by the other river; at no great distance. "If you'll hark, maybe you can hear the long saws at work. . . ."

He led them to it, the small children bringing up the rear of the procession. The *Z'm—Z'm* of the saws grew loud in Ruth's ears before crossing the ridge she spied the huts between the trees—a congregation of ten or a dozen standing a little way back from a smooth-flowing river. Between the huts and the river were many saw-pits, with men at work.

At young Adam's hail the men in view desisted, quite as though he had sounded the dinner horn. Heads of others emerged from the pits. Within a minute there was a small crowd gathered, of burly fellows diffusing the fragrance of pine sawdust, all stamped in their degrees with the M'Lauchlin family likeness, and all eager to know the strangers' business.

Sir Oliver explained that he wanted a boat and two strong guides, to explore the upper waters. He would pay any price, in moderation.

"Ay," said their spokesman. He wore a magnificent iron-grey beard powdered with sawdust; and he carried a gigantic pair of shoulders, but rheumatism had contracted them to a permanent stoop. "Ay, I'm no fearin' about the pay. You'll be the rich man, the Collector from Boston."

Ruth was startled. She had supposed herself to be travelling deep into the wilderness. She had yet to learn that in the wilderness, where men traffic in little else, they exchange gossip with incredible energy—talk it, in fact, all the time. In those early colonial days the settlers overleapt and left behind them leagues of primeval forest, and left it to all appearance inviolate. But its solitude was no longer virgin. Where foot of man had once parted the undergrowth the very breath of the wind followed and bore messages to and fro.

"I'm no speirin'," said the oldster cautiously. "But though our lads have never been so far, there's talk of a braw house buildin'."

Here, somewhat hastily, Sir Oliver took him aside, and they spent twenty minutes or so in converse together. Ruth waited.

He came back and selected young Adam, with a cousin of his—a taciturn youth, by name Jesse, son of Andrew—to be their boatman. Five or six of the

young men were evidently eager to be chosen; but none disputed his choice. Rome, which reaches everywhere, reigned in the forest here; its old law of family unquestioned and absolute. The two youths swung off to pack and provision the canoe. An hour later they reported that all was ready; and by three in the afternoon the voyagers were on their way up-stream.

The voyage lasted four days and was seldom laborious; for the river ran in long loops through the tableland, and with an easy current. But here and there shallow runs of rock made stairways for it from one level to another, and each of these miniature rapids compelled a portage; so that towards the end of the second day the young men had each a red shoulder spot chafed by the canoe's weight.

They camped by night close beside the murmuring water, ate their supper beside a fire of boughs, slept on piled leaves beneath a tent of canvas stretched over a long ridge-pole. The two young men had a separate and similar tent.

For two days the forest hemmed them in so closely that although frost had half stripped the deciduous trees, the eye found few vistas save along the river ahead. On either hand was drawn a continuous curtain of mossed stems and boughs overlapping and interlacing their delicate twigs. Scarcely a bird sang within the curtain; scarcely a woodland sound broke in upon the monotonous plash of the paddles. Alder, birch, maple, pine,

spruce, and hemlock—the woods were a lifeless tapestry. Ahead curved and stretched the water-way, rippled now and again by a musk-rat crossing, swimming with its nose and no more above water.

A little before noon on the third day they emerged from this forest upon a wide track of burnt land; and certain hills of which the blue tops had for some hours been visible above the tree-tops on their right, now took shape from the base up, behind thin clumps of birch, poplar, and spruce—all of them (but the spruce especially) ragged and stunted in growth. For the rest this burnt land resembled a neglected pasture, being carpeted for the most part with moss and blueberry. A mysterious blight lay over all, and appeared to extend to the foot of the hills.

All through the afternoon the chine of these hills closed the landscape for our travellers; purpled at times by passing clouds, at times lit up by sun-rays that defined every bush and seam on its slopes. All through the afternoon the folded gullies between the slopes unwound themselves interminably, little by little, as they traced up the river, paddling almost due southward, along its loops and meanders.

But by nightfall they had turned the last spur of the range, and the next morning opened to them a vastly different landscape: an undulating country, wooded like a park, with hills indeed, but scattered ones to the south and west, and behind the hills the faint purple

dome of a far-distant mountain, so faintly seen that at first Ruth mistook it for a cloud.

She could not tell afterwards—though she often asked herself the question—at what point the landscape struck her as being strangely familiar. Yet she was sure that the recognition came to her suddenly. Sir Oliver since the morning's start had been indisposed to talk. From time to time he drew out his map and consulted it. The M'Lauchlin lads, on the other hand, seemed to be restless. During the halt for the midday meal they drew aside together and Ruth heard them conversing in eager whispers.

Possibly this stirred some expectation in her, which passed into surmise, into certainty. Late in the afternoon she drew in the paddle she had been plying, laid it across the canoe, and called softly,—

"Oliver!"

He turned. She was pointing to a hill now full in view ahead of them.

"That cliff . . . you remember—the Eagles?"

He laughed as though the question amused him.

"It is very like. Yes, certainly, it is very like. But wait until we open the clump of trees yonder. . . ."

They opened it, and her heart gave a leap. A moment before she had been sure this was the very hill. His laugh had confirmed it. . . . She remembered how, at the foot of it, just such a river as this looped itself through the plain. . . . But, lo! in the opening gap,

inch by inch, a long building displayed itself: a mansion, gleaming white, with a pillared front and pillared terraces, rising—terrace on terrace—from the woodland, into which a cascade of water, spouting half-way down the slope, plunged and was lost.

She sat dumb. His eyes were upon her; and he laughed quietly.

"It is yours—as you commanded. See!"

He flung out a hand to the left. She beheld a clearing—an avenue, that ran like a broad ribbon to the summit of a flat-topped rise.

"You demanded sight of the ocean," he was saying, and his voice seemed to lose itself in the beat of the churning paddles. "We cannot see it from here, but from the house—*your* house—you shall look on it every day. Did you not bid me remove a mountain?"

For the rest of the way she sat as in a dream. One of the M'Lauchlin lads had produced a cow-horn and was blowing it lustily. . . . They came to shore by river-stairs of stone, where two servants in the Vyell livery stood like statues awaiting them.

It was falling dusk when Sir Oliver disembarked and gave her his hand. The men-servants, who had bent to hold the canoe steady as she stepped ashore, drew themselves erect and again touched foreheads to their lord and lady.

Still as in a dream, her arm resting within her lover's, she went up the broad stairways from terrace to terrace. Above her the long façade was lit with window after window blazing welcome.

At the head of the perron, under the colonnaded portico, other tall men-servants stood in waiting, mute, deferential. She passed between their lines into a vast entrance hall, and there, almost as her foot crossed its threshold, across the marbled floor little Miss Quiney came running a-flutter, inarticulate, with reaching hands.

Ruth drew back, almost with a cry. But before she could resist Tatty's arms were about her and Tatty's lips lifted, pressed against either cheek. She suffered the embrace.

"My darling Ruth!—at last!" Then with a laugh, "And in what strange clothes! . . . But come—come and be arrayed." She caught Ruth's cold hand and led her towards the staircase. "Nay, never look about you so: your eyes will not take in a tenth of all the wonders!"

Later, as an Indian gong sounded below, he came from his dressing-room into the great bride-chamber where she stood, arrayed in satin, before her mirror, hesitating as her fingers touched one after another of the jewels scattered on the dressing-table under the waxen lights. Her maid slipped away discreetly.

"Well?" he asked. He was resplendent in a suit of sapphire velvet, with cravat and ruffles of old Spanish lace. "Is my love content with her home-coming?"

She crossed her arms slowly.

"You are good to me," she said. "You do me too great honour, my lord."

He laughed, and catching up a necklace of diamonds from the dressing-table, looped it across her throat, clasped it, leaned over her shoulder and kissed her softly between the ear and the cheek's delicate round. Their eyes met in the mirror.

"I invited the Quiney," he said gaily, "to give you a feeling of home among these strange faces. She will not dine with us, though, unless you choose."

"Let us be alone, to-night," she pleaded.

"So be it. . . . But you shiver: you are cold. No? Then weary, perhaps—yes, and hungry. I've a back-woods hunger for my part. Let us go down and dine."

BOOK IV

LADY GOOD-FOR-NOTHING

CHAPTER I

BATTY LANGTON, CHRONICLER

From Batty Langton, Esquire, to the Hon. Horatio Walpole

BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS,
January 21*st*, 1748.

. . . . . You ask me, my dear sir, why I linger on year by year in this land of Cherokees and Choctaws, as you put it, at the same time hinting very delicately that now, with my poor old father in his grave and my own youthful debts discharged, you see no enduring reason for this exile. It is kind of you to be so solicitous: kinder still to profess that you yet miss me. But that I am missed at White's is more than you shall persuade me to believe. In an earlier letter, written when the Gaming Act passed, you told me they were for nailing up an escutcheon to mourn the death of play; they nailed up none for me. And I gather that play has recovered, and Dick Edgcumbe holds my cards. I doubt if I could endure to revisit St. James's—save by moonlight perhaps. *Rappelez-moi* to the waiters. They will remember me.

But in good deed, dear sir, what should I be doing at home among the Malvern Hills upon a patrimony of £800?—for to that it has dwindled. Can I hoe turnips, or poke a knowledgeable finger into the flanks of beeves? I wonder if your literary explorations ever led you across the furrow of an ancient ploughman who

—on a May morning, on Malvern hills

was weary of wandering and laid him down to sleep beside a brook—having been chased thither betimes, no doubt, by a nagging bedfellow. I have no wife, nor mean to take one, and find it more to my comfort to sleep here by the River Charles and dream of Malvern, secure that I shall wake to find myself detached from it by half a world.

Yet your last letter touched me closely; for it happens that Sir O. V., for love of whom rather than for any better reason I have kept this exile, has taken to himself a Lady. That, you'll say, should be my dismissal; and that I like her, as she appears willing to be friends with me, gives me, you'll say again, no excuse to linger. Yet I do, and shall.

As for her history, Vyell picked her up in a God-forsaken fishing town, some leagues up the coast; brought her home; placed her under gouvernante and tutors; finally espoused her. Stay: finally he has built a palace for her, "Eagles" by name, whither he forces all Boston to pay its homage. For convenience

of access to the goddess he has cut a road twenty feet broad through the woodlands of her demesne.

> The palace in a woody vale they found,
> High-raised, of stone—

or, to speak accurately, of stone and timber combined. Be pleased to imagine a river very much like that of Richmond, but covered with grey crags. "Fie," you will say, "the site is savage, then, like all else in this New World?" My dear sir, you were never more mistaken. Mr. Manley's young eye of genius fastened upon it at once, to adapt it to a house and gardens in the Italian style.

Have I mentioned this Mr. Manley in former letters? He is a young gentleman of good Midland blood (his county, I believe, Bedfordshire), with a moderate talent for drinking, a something more than talent for living on his friends, and a positive genius for architecture. He will have none of your new craze for Gothic. Palladio is his god, albeit he allows that Palladio had feet of clay, and corrects him boldly—though always, as he tells me, with help of his minor deities, Vignola and the rest, who built the great villas around Rome. He has studied in Italy, and tells me that at Florence he was much beholden to your friend Mann, who, I dare swear, lost money by the acquaintance.

Vyell, his present patron, takes him out and shows

him the site. "Italy!" exclaims the Youth of Genius. "Italy?" echoes Mæcenas, astonished. "We'll make it so," says the Youth. "These terraces, this spouting water, these pines to serve us for cypresses." "But, my good sir, the House?" cries the impatient Vyell. "A fig for your house! Any fool can design a house when the Almighty and an artist together have once made the landscape for it. Grant me two years for the gardens," he pleads. "You shall have ten months to complete landscape, house, everything." "I shall need armies of workmen." "You shall have them." The Youth groaned. "I shall be sober for ten months on end!" "What of that?" says V. Lovers are unconscionable.

Well, the Youth sits down to his plans, and at once orders begin to fly across ocean to this port and that for the rarest marbles—*rosso antico* from Mount Taenarus, *verde antico* from Thessaly; with green Carystian, likewise shipped from Corinth; Carrara, Veronese Orange, Spanish *broccatello*, Derbyshire alabaster, black granite from Vyell's Cornish estate, red and purple porphyries from high up the Nile. . . . The Youth conjures up his gardens as by magic. Here you have a terrace fenced with columns; below it a cascade pouring down a stairway of circular basins—the hint of it borrowed from Frascati (from the Villa Torlonia, if I remember); there an alley you'd swear was Boboli dipping to rise across the river, on a stairway you'd

swear as positively was Val San Zibio. Yet all is congruous. The dog scouts the Villa d'Este for a "toy-shop."

The house at first disappoints one, being straight and simple to the last degree. "D—n me," says he, "what can you look for, in ten months?" It is of two stories, the windows of the upper story loftier by one-third than those beneath; and has for sole ornament a balustraded parapet broken midway by an Ionic portico of twelve columns, with a *loggia* deeply recessed above its entrance door. To this portico a flight of sixteen steps conducts you from the uppermost terrace.

Such is Vyell's new pleasance of Eagles, Boston's latest wonder. I have described it at this length because you profess to take more interest in houses than in women; and also, to tell the truth, because I am shy of describing Lady V. To call her roundly the loveliest creature I have ever set eyes on, or am like to, is (you will say) no description, though it may argue me in love with her.

On my honour, no! or only as all others are in love—all the men, I mean, and even some proportion of the womankind. The rest agree to call her "Lady Good-for-Nothing," upon a double rumour, of which one half is sad truth, and the other (my life on it) false as hell.

They have heard that when Vyell found her she was a serving-girl, undergoing punishment (a whipping, to

be precise) for some trumpery offence against the Sabbath. Yes, my dear sir, this is true; as it is true also that Vyell, like a knight-errant of old, offered to share her punishment, and did indeed share it to the extent of sitting in the stocks beside her. You'd have thought an honest mind might find food for compassion in this, and even an excuse to believe the better of human nature; but it merely scandalises these Puritan tabbies. They fear Vyell for his wealth and title; and he, despising them, forces them to visit her.

Now for the falsehood. The clergyman who read the marriage ceremony for V. somewhere in the backwoods (this, too, was his whim, and they have to be content with it) is a low-bred trencher-chaplain, by name Silk. He should have been unfrocked the next week, not for performing a function apostolically derived, but for spreading a report—I wait to fasten it on him—that before marriage she was no better than she should be. I have earned better right than any other man to know Vyell, and I know it to be calumny. But the wind blows, and the name "Lady Good-for-Nothing" is a by-breath of it.

Vyell guesses nothing of this. He has a masculine judgment and no small degree of wit—though 'tis of a hard intellectual kind; but through misprising his fellow creatures he has come to lack *flair*. His lady, if she scent a taint on the wind wafted through her routs and assemblies, no doubt sets it down to breath-

ings upon her humble origin, or (it may be) even to some leaking gossip of her foregone wrong. (Women, my dear sir, are brutes to rend a wounded one of the herd.) She can know nothing of the worse slander.

She moves through her duties as hostess with a pretty, well-bred grace, and a childishness infinitely touching. Yet something more protects her; a certain common sense, which now and then very nearly achieves wit. For an instance—But yesterday a certain pompous lady lamented to her in my hearing (and with intention, as it seemed to me, who am grown suspicious) the rapid moral decay of Boston society. "Alas!" sighs my heroine; "but what a comfort, ma'am, to think that neither of us belongs to it!" Add to this that she has learning enough to equip ten *précieuses*—and hides it: has read Plato and can quote her Virgil by the page—but forbears. Yet all this while you have suspected me, no doubt, of raving over a *Belle Sauvage*.

Well, I shall watch her progress. . . . I have become so nearly a part of Vyell that I charge myself to stand for him and supply what he lacks. He loves her; she loves him to doting; but I cannot see into their future.

Vyell, by the way, charges me to request your good offices with Mr. Mann to procure him a couple of Tuscan vases. I know that your friend is infinitely obliging to all who approach him through you: and this request

which my letter carries as a tag should have been its pretext, as in fact it was its occasion. Adieu! my dear sir.

Yours most sincerely,

BAT. LANGTON.

CHAPTER II

SIR OLIVER SAILS

MR. LANGTON was right. Theologians, preaching mysteries, are helpless before the logical mind until they abandon defence and boldly attack their opponents' capital incapacity, saying, "Precisely because you insist upon daylight, you miss discovering the stars." The battle is a secular one, and that sentence contains the reason, too, why it will never be ended in this world. But the theologians may strengthen their conviction, if not their argument, by noting how often the more delicate shades of human feeling will oppose themselves to the logical mind as a mere wall of blindness.

Oliver Vyell loved his bride as passionately as his nature, hardened by his past, allowed him. To the women who envied her, to the gossips and backbiters, he opposed a nescience inexpugnable, unscalable as a wall of polished stone: but the mischief was, he equally ignored her sensitiveness. Being sensitive, she understood the hostile shadows better than the hard protecting fence. To noble natures enemies are often nearer than friends, and more easily forgiven.

But Mr. Langton was also right in guessing her ignorant of the rumours set going by Silk, who, as yet, had whispered falsehoods only. The worst rumour of all—the truth—was beyond his courage.

Ruth loved her lord devoutly. To love him was so easy that it seemed no repayment of her infinite debt. She desired some harder task; and therefore, since he laid this upon her, she—who would have chosen a solitude to be happy in—rejoiced to meet these envious ladies with smiles, with a hundred small graces of hospitality; and still her bliss swallowed up their rancour, scarcely tasting its gall. He (they allowed) was the very pattern of a lover.

He was also a model man of business. Even from his most flagrant extravagances, as Batty Langton notes in another epistle, he usually contrived to get back something like his money's worth. He would lend money, or give it, where he chose: but to the man who overreached him in a money bargain he could be implacable. Moreover, though a hater of quarrels, he never neglected an enmity he had once taken up, but treated it with no less exactitude than a business account.

Their happiness had endured a little more than three months when, one morning, he entered Ruth's morning-room with a packet of letters in his hand. He was frowning, not so much in wrath, as in distaste of what he had to tell.

"Dear," he said brusquely, bending to kiss her, "I have ill news. I must go back to England, on business."

"To England?" she echoed. Her wrists were laid along the arms of her chair, and, as she spoke, her fingers clutched sharply at the padding. She was not conscious of it. She was aware only that somehow, at the back of her happiness this shadow had always lurked—and that England lay across the seas, at an immense distance. . . .

He went on—his tone moody, but the words brief and distant. "For a few months, only; five or six, perhaps; with any luck, even less. That infernal aunt of mine——"

"Lady Caroline?" She asked it less out of curiosity than as a prompter gives a cue; for he had come to a full stop. She was wondering how Lady Caroline could injure him, being so far away. . . .

He laughed savagely, yet—having broken his news, or the worst of it—with something of relief. "She shall smart for it—if that console you?"

"Is it on my account?"

"Only, as I guess, in so far as she accuses you of having played the devil with her plan for marrying me up with my cousin Di'. If Di' had been the last woman in the world. . . . But the old harridan never spoke to me after the grooming I gave her that morning at Natchett. 'Faith, and I did treat her to some plain talk!" he wound up with another laugh.

"But what harm can she do you?"

He explained that his late uncle Sir Thomas had, in the closing years of his life, shown unmistakable signs of brain-softening, and that a symptom of his complaint had been his addiction to making a number of wills—"two-thirds of 'em incoherent. Every two or three days he'd compose a new one and send for Huskisson, his lawyer; and Huskisson, after reading the rigmarole through, as solemn as a judge, would get it solemnly witnessed and carry it off. He had three boxes full of these lunacies when the old man died, and I'll wager he has not destroyed 'em. Lawyers never destroy handwriting, however foolish. It's against their principles."

"But," said Ruth, musing, "I understood that he died of a gaol-fever, caught at the Assizes, where he was serving on—what do you call it?"

"The Grand Jury."

"Well, how could he be serving on a Grand Jury if his head was affected as you say?"

"You don't know England," he assured her. "Ten to one as a County magnate he stickled for it, and the High Sheriff put him on the panel to keep him amused."

"But a Grand Jury deals sometimes with matters of life and death, does it not?"

"Often, but only in the first instance. It finds a true bill usually, and sends the cause down to be tried by

judge and jury, to dispose of it. Actually the incompetence of a grand juror or two doesn't count, if the scandal be not too glaring. . . . But I see your drift. It will be a point for the other side, no matter how lunatic the document, that after perpetrating it he was still thought capable by the High Sheriff of his county."

"I do not know that the point struck me. I was wondering—" Here she broke off. The thought, in fact, uppermost in her mind was that he had not suggested her voyaging to England with him.

"It *is* a point, anyway," he persisted. "But it won't stand against Huskisson's documentary proof of lunacy. . . . You see, the greater part of the property was entailed, and the poor old fool couldn't touch it. But there's an unentailed estate in Devonshire—Downton by name—worth about two thousand a year. By a will made in '41, when his mind was admittedly sound, he left it to me with a charge upon it of five hundred for Lady Caroline. By a second, made three years later and duly witnessed, he left her Downton for her life; and with that I chose not to quarrel, though I could have brought evidence that he was unfit to make any will. I agreed with the infernal woman to let things stand on that. But now, being at daggers drawn with me, she digs up (if you please) a will made in '46 and apparently sane in wording, by which, without any provision for the heir-at-law, the whole bagful, real and personal, goes to her, to be used by her and willed

away, as she pleases; this, although she well knows I can prove Sir Thomas to have been a blethering idiot at the time."

"Is it worth while?"

"Worth while?" he echoed, as if doubtful that she had understood. "The woman is doing it out of spite, of course. Very likely she is fool enough to think that, fixed here with the Atlantic between us, I shall give her the double gratification of annoying me and letting her win by default."

"It is a large sum," she mused.

"Of course it is," he agreed sharply. "An estate yielding two thousand pounds interest. You would not suggest my letting it go, I should hope!"

"Certainly not, if you cannot afford it."

"If it were a twentieth part of the sum, I'd not be jockeyed out of it." He laughed harshly. "As men go, I am well-to-do: but, dear, has it never occurred to you to wonder what this place and its household cost me?"

She answered with a small wry smile. "Often it has occurred to me. Often I tell myself that I am wicked to accept, as you are foolish perhaps to give, all this luxury."

"You adorn it. . . . Dear, do not misunderstand me. All the offering I can bring is too little for my love."

"I know," she murmured, looking up at him with moist eyes. "I know; and yet——"

"I meant only that you are not used to handling money or calculating it—as why should you be?"

"If my lord will only try me!"

"Hey?"

"Of what use is a wife if she may not contrive for her husband's good—take thought for his household? Ah, my dear, these cares are half a woman's happiness! . . . I might make mistakes. Nay, 'tis certain. I would the house were smaller: in a sense I would that your wealth were smaller—it would frighten me less. But something tells me that, though frightened, I should not fail you."

He stared down at her, pulling his lip moodily. "I was thinking," said he, "to ask Langton to be my steward. Would you really choose to be cumbered with all this business?"

She held her breath for a moment; for his question meant that he had no design to take her with him. Her face paled a little, but she answered steadily.

"It will at least fill my empty hours. . . . Better, dear—it will keep you before me in all the day's duties; since, though I miss you, all day long I shall be learning to be a good wife."

As she said it her hand went up to her side beneath her left breast, as something fluttered there, soft as a bird's wing stirring. It fluttered for a moment under her palm, then ceased. The room had grown strangely still. . . . Yet he was speaking.

He was saying—"I'll teach these good people who's Head of the Family!"

Ah, yes—"the Family!" Should she tell him? . . . She bethought her of Mrs. Harry's sudden giddiness in the waggon. Mrs. Harry was now the mother of a lusty boy—Sir Oliver's heir, and the Family's prospective Head. . . . Should she tell him? . . .

He stooped and kissed her. "Love, you are pale. I have broken this news too roughly."

She faltered. "When must you start?"

"In three days. That's as soon as the *Maryland* can take in the rest of her cargo and clear the customs."

"They will be busy days for you."

"Desperately."

"Yet you must spare me a part of one, and teach me to keep accounts," said she, and smiled bravely albeit her face was wan.

CHAPTER III

MISCALCULATING WRATH

MR. LANGTON sat in his private apartment by Boston Quay trying the balance of a malacca cane.

Sir Oliver had sailed a week ago. Mr. Langton had walked down to the ship with him and taken his farewell instructions.

"By the way," said Sir Oliver, "I want you to make occasion to visit Eagles now and again, and pay your respects. I shall write to you as well as to her; and the pair of you can exchange news from your letters. She likes you."

"I hope so," answered Langton, "because 'tis an open secret that I adore her."

Sir Oliver smiled, a trifle ruefully. "Then you'll understand how it hits a man to leave her. Maybe—for I had meant to make you paymaster in my absence—you'll also forgive me for having changed my mind?"

"I'd have called you a damned fool if you hadn't," said Langton equably. "She's your wife, hang it all—and I'll lay you five pounds you'll return to find her with hair dishevelled over your monstrous careless bookkeeping. My dear Noll, a woman—a good

woman—is never completely happy till convinced that she, and only she, has saved the man she loves from ruin; and, what's more, she's a fool if she can't prove it."

"Nevertheless she's a beginner; and I'll be glad of your promise to run over from time to time. A question or two will soon discover if things are running on an even keel."

"I shall attempt no method so coarse," Langton assured him. "I don't want to be ordered out of the house—must I repeat that I adore her? It may be news to you that she repays my attachment with a certain respect. . . . Should she find herself in any difficulty—and she will not—I shall be sent for and consulted. In any event, fond man, you may count on my calling."

As they shook hands Sir Oliver asked, "Don't you envy me, Batty?"

"Constantly and in everything," answered Langton; "though—ass that I am—I have rather prided myself on concealing it."

"I mean, don't you wish that you, and not I, were sailing for England? For that matter, though, there's nothing prevents you."

"Oh yes—there is."

"What, then?"

"Use and wont, if you will; indolence, if you choose; affection for you, Noll, if you prefer it."

"That had been an excellent reason for coming with me."

"It may be a better one for staying. . . . Well, as you walk up St. James's, give it my regards."

"For so fine an intelligence Noll can be infernally crass at times," muttered Mr. Langton to himself as he walked back to his lodgings.

He kept his promise and rode over to Eagles ten days later, to pay Ruth a visit. He found her astonishingly cheerful. The sum left by Sir Oliver for her stewardship had scared her at first. It scared her worse to discover how the heap began to drain away as through a sieve. But slowly she saw her way to stop some of the holes in that sieve. He had calculated her expenses, taking for basis the accounts of the past few months; and in the matter of entertaining, for example, she would save vast sums. . . . She foresaw herself a miser almost, to earn his praise.

"*—Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies. The heart of her husband shall safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil. She will do him good and not evil all the days of his life.*

"*She seeketh wool, and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands. She is like the merchants' ships; she bringeth her food from afar. She riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household. . . . She*

considereth a field and buyeth it. . . . She looketh well into the ways of her household.

"*Her children rise up, and call her blessed. . . .*" Her children? But she had let him go, after all, without telling her secret.

Mr. Langton sat and balanced a malacca cane in his hand. When his man announced the Reverend Mr. Silk, he laid it down carefully on the floor beside him.

"Show Mr. Silk up, if you please."

Mr. Silk entered with an affable smile. "Ah, good-morning, Mr. Langton!" said he, depositing his hat on the table and pulling off a pair of thick woollen gloves. "I am prompt on your call, eh? But this cold weather invites a man to walk briskly. Not to mention," he added, with an effort at facetiousness, "that when Mr. Langton sends for a clergyman his need is presumably urgent."

"It is," said Mr. Langton, seemingly blind to the hand he proffered. "Would you, before taking a seat, oblige me by throwing a log on the fire? . . . Thank you—the weather is raw, as you say."

"Urgent? But not serious, I hope?"

"Both. Sit down, please. . . . I am, as you know, a particular friend of Sir Oliver Vyell's."

"Say, rather, his best." Mr. Silk bowed and smiled.

"Possibly. At all events so close a friend that, being absent, he gives me the right to resent any dishonouring suspicion that touches him—or touches his lady. It comes to the same thing."

Mr. Silk cocked his head sideways, like a bird considering a worm. "Does it?" he queried, after a slight pause.

"Certainly. A rumour is current through Boston, touching Lady Vyell's virtue; or, at least, her conduct before marriage."

"'Tis a censorious world, Mr. Langton."

"Maybe; but let us avoid generalities, Mr. Silk. What grounds have you for imputing this misconduct to Lady Vyell?"

"Me, sir?" cried Mr. Silk, startled out of his grammar.

"You, sir." Mr. Langton arose lazily, and stepping to the door, turned the key; then returning to the hearth, in leisurely manner turned back his cuffs. "I have traced the slander to you, and hold the proofs. Perhaps you had best stand up and recant it before you take your hiding. But, whether or no, I am going to hide you," he promised, with his engaging smile. Stooping swiftly he caught up the malacca. Mr. Silk sprang to his feet and snatched at the chair, dodging sideways.

"Strike as you please," he snarled; "Ruth Josselin is a—" But before the word could out Batty Langton's first blow beat down his guard. The second fell

across his exposed shoulders, the third stunningly on the nape of his neck. The fourth—a back-hander—welted him full in the face, and the wretched man sank screaming for pity.

Batty Langton had no pity. "Stand up, you hound!" he commanded. The command was absurd, and he laughed savagely, tickled by its absurdity even in his fury, while he smote again and again. He showered blows until, between blow and blow, he caught his breath and panted. Mr. Silk's screams had sunk to blubbings and whimpers. Between the strokes he heard them.

His valet was knocking timorously on the door. "All right!" called Langton, lifting his cane and lowering it slowly—for his victim lay still. He stooped to drag aside the arm covering the huddled face. As he did so, Mr. Silk snarled again, raised his head and bit blindly, fastening his teeth in the flesh of the left hand. Langton wrenched free and, as the man scrambled to his feet, dealt him with the same hand a smashing blow on the mouth—a blow that sent him reeling back and crashing to the floor again across an overturned chair.

Somehow the pleasure of getting in that blow restored—literally at a stroke—Langton's good temper. He laughed and tossed the cane into a corner.

"You may stand up now," said he sweetly. "You are not going to be beaten any more."

Mr. Silk stood up. His mouth trickled blood, and he nursed his right wrist, where the cane had smitten across the bone. Langton stepped to the door and, unlocking it, admitted his trembling valet.

"My good fool," he said, "didn't I call to you not to be alarmed? Mr. Silk, here, has been seized with a —a kind of epileptic fit. Help him downstairs and call a chair for him. Don't stare; he will not bite again for a very long time."

But in this Mr. Langton was mistaken.

He took the precaution of cauterising his bitten hand; and before retiring to rest that night contemplated it grimly, holding it out to the warmth of his bachelor fire. It was bandaged; but above the edge of the bandage his knuckles bore evidence how they had retaliated upon Mr. Silk's teeth.

He eyed these abrasions for a while and ended with a soft complacent laugh. "Queer, how little removed we are, after all, from the natural savage!" he murmured. "Ladies and Gentlemen, allow me to introduce to your notice Betty Langton, Esquire, a child of nature—not perhaps of the best period—still using his naked fists and for a woman—primitive cause of quarrel; and didn't he enjoy it, by George!"

He laughed again softly. But, could he have foreseen, he had been willing rather to cut the hand off for its day's work.

CHAPTER IV

THE TERRACE

RUTH was happy. To-day, and for a whole week to come, she was determined to be purely happy, blithe as the spring sunshine upon the terrace. For a week she would, like Walton's milkmaid, cast away care and refuse to load her mind with any fears of many things that will never be. Her spirit sang bird-like within her. And the reason?—that the *Venus* had arrived in harbour, with Dicky on board.

Peace had been signed, or was on the point to be signed, and in the North Atlantic waters His Majesty's captains of frigates could make a holiday of duty. Captain Harry used his holiday to sail up for Boston, standing in for Carolina on his way and fetching off his wife and his firstborn—a bouncing girl. It was time, they agreed, to pay their ceremonial visit to Sir Oliver and his bride; high time also for Dicky to return and embrace his father.

Sir Oliver had written of his approaching marriage. "Well, dear," was Mrs. Harry's comment, "'twas always certain he would marry. As for Ruth Josselin, she is an amazingly beautiful girl and I believe her

to be good. So there's no more to be said but to wish 'em joy."

Captain Harry kissed his wife. "Glad you take it so, Sally. I was half afraid—for of course there *was* the chance, you know——"

"I'm not a goose, I hope, to cry for the moon!"

"Is that the way of geese?" he asked, and they both laughed.

A second letter had come to them from Eagles, telling them of his happiness, and franking a note in which Ruth prettily acknowledged Mrs. Harry's congratulations.

A third had been despatched; a hurried one, announcing his departure for England. Before this reached Carolina, however, the *Venus* had sailed, and Dicky rushed home to find his father gone.

But a message came down to Boston Quay, with the great coach for Mrs. Vyell, and the baggage and saddle-horses for the gentlemen. There were three saddle-horses, for Ruth added an invitation for Mr. Hanmer, "if the discipline of the ship would allow."

"She always was the thoughtfullest!" cried Dicky. "Why, sir, to be sure you must come too. . . . We'll go shooting. Is it too late for partridge? . . . One forgets the time of year, down in the islands."

Strangely enough Mr. Hanmer, so shy by habit, offered but a slight resistance.

It was Dicky who, as Ruth sped to him with a happy little cry, hung on his heel a moment and blushed violently. She took him in her arms, exclaiming at his growth.

"Why—look, Tatty—'tis a man! And is that what he means?—Ah, Dicky, don't say you're too tall to kiss your old playmate."

Then, holding him a little away and still observing his confusion, she remembered his absurd boyish love for her and how he had confessed it. Well, she must put him at his ease. . . . She turned laughingly to welcome the others, and now for a moment she too flushed rosy-red as she shook hands with Mr. Hanmer. She could not have told why; but perhaps it was that instead of returning her smile, his eyes rested on her face gravely, intently, as though unable to drag themselves away.

Captain Harry and his wife marvelled, as well they might, at the house and its wonders. Sir Oliver had chosen to take his meals French fashion and at French hours; and Ruth apologised for having kept up the custom. Captain Harry, after protesting against so ungodly a practice, admitted that his ride had hungered him, and at *dèjeuner* proved it not only upon the courses but upon the cold meats on the side-table.

"You must have a jewel of a housekeeper, my dear!" Mrs. Harry had been taking in every detail of the

ordered service. "'Housekeeper,' do I say? 'Majordomo'—you'll forgive me——"

Ruth swept her a bow. "I take the compliment."

"And she deserves it," added Miss Quiney.

"What? You don't tell me you manage it all yourself? . . . This palace of a house!"

"Already you are making it feel less empty to me. Yes, alone I do it; but if you wish to praise me, you should see my accounts. *They* are my real pride. But no, they are too holy to be shown!"

They sat later—the gentlemen by their wine—on the stone terrace overlooking the wide champaign.

"But," said Ruth, for she observed that the boy was restless, "I must leave Tatty to play hostess while I take a scamper with Dick. There's a pool below here, Dicky, with oh, such trout!"

Dicky was on his feet in a trice. "Rods?"

"Rods, if you will. But there are the stables, too, to be seen; and the gunroom——"

"Stables? Gunroom?—Oh, come along!—the day is too short!" Here Dicky paused. "But would you like to come too, sir?" he asked, addressing Mr. Hanmer.

Mrs. Harry laughed. "Those two," she told Ruth, "are like master and dog, and one never can be quite sure which is which."

"My dear boy," said Mr. Hanmer, "you must surely see that Lady Vyell wants you all to herself. Yet I

dare say the captain and I will be strolling around to the stables before long."

"Ay, when this decanter is done," agreed Captain Harry.

"That was rather pretty of you," said Ruth, as she and the boy went down the terrace stairs together.

"What?—asking old Hanmer to come with us? . . . Oh, but he's the best in the world, and, what's more, never speaks out of his turn. He has a tremendous opinion of you, too."

"Indeed?"

"Worships the very ground you tread on."

Ruth laughed. "Were those his words?"

Dicky laughed too. "Likely they would be! Fancy old Han talking like a sick schoolgirl! I made the words up to please you—but it's the truth, all the same."

They reached the pool; and the boy, after ten minutes spent in discovering the biggest monster among the trout and attempting to tickle him with a twig, fell to prodding the turfed brink thoughtfully.

"We talked a deal about you, first-along," he blurted at length. "I fancy old Han guessed that I was—was—well, fond of you and all that sort of thing."

"Dear Dicky!"

"Boys are terrible softies at this age," my young master admitted. "And, after all, it was rather a

knockdown, you know, when papa's letter came with the news."

"But we're friends, eh?—you and I—just as before?"

"Oh, of course—only you might have told. . . . And I've brought you a parrot. Remember the parrots in that old fellow's shop in Port Nassau?"

She led him to talk of his sea adventures, of the ship, of the West Indies among which they had been cruising; and as they wandered back from terrace to terrace he poured out a stream of boyish gossip about his shipmates, from Captain Vyell down to the cook's dog. Half of it was Hebrew to her; but in every sentence of it, and in the gay, eager voice, she read that the child had unerringly found his vocation; that the sea lent him back to the shore for a romp and a holiday, but that to the sea he belonged.

"There's one thing against shipboard though." He had come to a halt, head aslant, and said it softly, eyeing a tree some thirty yards distant.

"What?"

"No stones lying about." Picking up one, he launched it at a nuthatch that clung pecking at the moss on the bark. "Hit him, by George! Come——"

He ran and she raced after him for a few paces, but stopped half-way, with her hand to her side. The nuthatch was not hit after all, but had bobbed away into the green gloom.

"Tell you what—you can't run as you used," he said critically.

"No. . . ." She was wondering at the mysterious life a-flutter in her side—that it should be his brother.

"Not half. I'll have to get you into training. . . . Now show me the stables, please."

They were retracing their steps when along a green alley they saw Mr. Hanmer coming down to meet them. He was alone, and his face, always grave, seemed to Ruth graver than ever.

"Dicky," said he, "service, if you please."

"Ay, sir." Dicky's small person stiffened at once. Dicky's hand went up to the salute.

"Wait here, please. I wish a word in private with Lady Vyell—if you will forgive me, ma'am?"

"Why to be sure, sir," she answered, wondering. As he turned, she walked on with him. After some fifty paces she confronted him under the pale-green dappled shadows of the alley.

"Something has happened? Is it serious?"

"Yes."

Looking straight before him, as they resumed their walk, he told her; in brief words that seemed, as he jerked them out, to be pumped from him; that made no single coherent sentence, and yet were concise as a despatch in substance.

This in substance was Mr. Hanmer's report:—

They had remained on the terrace, seated, as she

had left them—Captain and Mrs. Harry, Miss Quiney and he. The Captain was talking. . . . A servant brought word that two ladies—Mr. Hanmer could not recall their names—had called from Boston and desired to see Mrs. Vyell. "Surely," protested Mrs. Harry, "they must mean Lady Vyell?" The servant was positive: Mrs. Captain Vyell had been the name. "They are anxious to pay their respects," suggested Miss Quiney. "Anxious indeed! Why we landed but a few hours since. They must have galloped." Miss Quiney was sent to offer them refreshment and discover their business.

Miss Quiney goes off on her errand. Minutes elapse. After many minutes the servant reappears. "Miss Quiney requests Mrs. Harry's attendance." Mrs. Harry goes.

"Women are queer cattle," says Captain Harry sententiously, and talks on. By-and-by the servant appears yet again. Mr. Hanmer is sent for. "Why, 'tis like a story I've read somewhere, about a family sent one by one to stop a tap running," says Captain Harry. "But I'll say this for the women—I'm always the last they bother."

Following the servant, Mr. Hanmer—so runs his report—enters the great drawing-room to find Miss Quiney stretched on the sofa, her face buried in cushions, and Mrs. Harry standing erect and confronting two ladies of forbidding aspect.

"In brief," concluded Mr. Hanmer, "she sent me for you."

"To confront them with her? I wonder what their business can be. . . ." With a glance at his side face she added, "I think you have not told me all."

"No," he confessed haltingly; "that's true enough. In—in fact Mrs. Harry first employed me to show them to the door."

"And—on the way?"

"Honoured madam——"

"They said—what?—quoting whom?"

"A Mr. Silk. But again—ma'am, I am awkward at lying. I cannot manage it."

"I like you the better for it."

"I did not believe——"

"Yet you might have believed. . . . And suppose that it were true, sir?"

He shook visibly. "I pray God to protect you," he managed to stammer.

Her face was white, but she answered him steadily. "I believe you to be a good man. . . . I will go to them. Where is Dicky?" She glanced back along the alley.

"Dicky will stand where I have told him to stand: for hours unless I release him."

"Is that your naval code? And can a mere child stand by it so proudly? Oh," cried she, fixing on him a look he remembered for years, "would to God I had been born a man!"

Yet fearlessly as any man she entered the great drawing-room. Miss Quiney still lay collapsed on her sofa. Mrs. Harry bent over her, but faced about.

"Mr. Hanmer managed, then, to discover you? Two women have called. . . . I thought it better, their errand being what it was, to show them out."

"I can guess it, perhaps," Ruth caught her up with a wan smile. "They managed to talk with him before he gave them their dismissal."

"Forgive me. I had not thought them capable——"

"There is nothing to forgive," Ruth assured her. "They probably told the truth, and the fault is mine."

Miss Quiney, incredulous, slowly raised her face from the cushions and stared.

"Yes," repeated Ruth, "the fault is entirely mine."

"But—but," stammered Mrs. Harry. Ruth had turned away towards the window, and the honest wife stared after her, against the light. "But he will make it all right when he returns." She started, of a sudden. Cunningly as Ruth had dressed herself, Mrs. Harry's eyes guessed the truth. "You have written to him?"

"No."

"He guesses, at least?"

"No."

"Then you are writing to him? There is enough time."

"No."

Their eyes met. Ruth's asked, "And if I do not, will you?" Mrs. Harry's met them for a few seconds and were abased.

No words passed between these two. "And as for my Tatty," said Ruth lightly, stepping to the sofa, "she is not to write. I command her."

CHAPTER V

A PROLOGUE TO NOTHING

SIR OLIVER wrote cheerfully. His lawsuit was prospering; his prompt invasion of the field had disconcerted Lady Caroline and her advisers. He had discovered fresh evidence of the late Sir Thomas's insanity. His own lawyers were sanguine. They assured him that, at the worst, the Courts would set aside the '46 will, and fall back for a compromise on that of '44, which gave the woman a life-interest only in the Downton estates. But the case would not be taken this side of the Long Vacation. . . . (It was certain, then, that he could not return in time.)

He had visited Bath and spent some weeks with his mother. He devoted a page or two to criticism of that fashionable city. It was clear he had picked up many threads of his younger days; had renewed old acquaintances and made a hundred new ones. Play, he wrote, was a craze in England; the stakes frightened a homecomer from New England. For his part, he gamed but moderately.

"As for the women, you have spoilt me for them. I see none—not one, dearest—who can hold a taper to

you. Their artifices disgust me; and I watch them, telling myself that my Ruth has only to enter their balls and assemblies to triumph—nay, to eclipse them totally. . . . And this reminds me to say that I have spoken with my mother. She had heard, of course, from more than one. Lady Caroline's account had been merely coarse and spiteful; but by that lady's later conduct she was already prepared to discount it. The pair encountered in London, at my Lady Newcastle's; and my mother (who has spirit) refused her bow. Diana, to her credit, appears to have done you more justice; and Mrs. Harry writes reams in your praise. To be sure my mother, not knowing Mrs. Harry, distrusts her judgment for a Colonial's; but I vow she is the soundest of women. . . . In short, dear Ruth, we have only to regularise things and we are forgiven. The good soul dotes on me, and imagines she has but a few years left to live. This softens her. . . .

"There is a rumour—credit it, if you can!—that my Aunt Caroline intends to espouse a Mr. Adam Rouffignac, a foreigner and a wine merchant; I suppose (since he is reputed rich) to arm herself with money to pay her lawyers. What *his* object can be, poor man, I am unable to conjecture. It is a strange world. While her ugly mother mates at the age of fifty, Diana—who started with all the advantages of looks—withers upon the maiden thorn. . . ."

His letters, every one, concluded with protests of

affection. She rejoiced in them. But it was now certain that he could not return in time.

At length, as her day drew near, she wrote to him, conceiving this to be her duty. She knew that he would take a blow from what she had to tell, and covered it up cleverly, lightly covering all her own dread. She hoped the child would be a boy. ("But why do I hope it?" she asked herself as she penned the words, and thought of Dicky.)

She said nothing of Mr. Silk's treachery; nothing of her ostracism. This indeed, during the later months, she recognised for the blessing it was.

Towards the end she felt a strange longing to have her mother near, close at hand, for her lying-in. The poor silly soul could not travel alone. . . . Ruth considered this and hit on the happy inspiration of inviting Mrs. Strongtharm to bring her. Tatty was useless, and among the few women who had been kind Mrs. Strongtharm had been the kindest.

Ruth sat down and penned a letter; and Mrs. Strongtharm, unable to write, responded valiantly. She arrived in a cart, with Mrs. Josselin at her side; and straightway alighting and neglecting Mrs. Josselin, sailed into a seventh heaven of womanly fuss. She examined the baby-clothes critically.

"Made with your own pretty hands—and with all this mort o' servants tumblin' over one another to help ye. But 'tis nat'ral. . . . It came to nothing with me, but I know. And expectin' a boy o' course. . . . La! ye blushin' one, don't I know the way of it!"

When Ruth's travail came on her the three were gathered by candle-light in Sir Oliver's dressing-room. Beyond the door, attended by her maid and a man-midwife, Ruth shut her teeth upon her throes. So the prologue opens.

Prologue

Mrs. Josselin sits in an armchair, regarding the pattern of the carpet with a silly air of self-importance; Mrs. Strongtharm in a chair opposite. By the window Miss Quiney, pulling at her knuckles, stares out through the dark panes. A clock strikes.

Miss Quiney (*with a nervous start*). Four o'clock . . . nine hours. . . .

Mrs. Strongtharm. More. The pains took her soon after six. . . . When her bell rang I looked at the clock. I remember.

Miss Quiney. My poor Ruth.

Mrs. Strongtharm. Eh? The first, o' course. . . . But a long labour's often the best.

Miss Quiney. There has not been a sound for hours.

Mrs. Strongtharm. She's brave. They say, too, that

a man-child, if he's a real strong one, will wait for day-break; but that's old women's notions, I shouldn't wonder.

Miss Quiney. A man-child? You think it will be?

Mrs. Strongtharm. (*She exchanges a glance with Mrs. Josselin, who has looked up suddenly and nods.*) Certain..

Mrs. Josselin. Certain, certain! I wonder, now, what they'll call him! After Sir Oliver, perhaps. Her own father's name was Michael. In my own family—that's the Pocock's—the men were mostly Williams and Georges. Called after the Kings of England.

Mrs. Strongtharm (*yawns*). Oliver Cromwell was as good as any king, and better. Leastways my man says so. For my part, I don't bother my head wi' these old matters.

Miss Quiney (*tentatively*). Do you know, I was half hoping it would be a girl, just like my darling. (*To herself*) God forgive me, when I think——

Mrs. Strongtharm (*interrupting the thought*). *She* won't be hoping for a girl. You don't understand these things, beggin' your pardon, ma'am.

Miss Quiney (*meekly*). No.

Mrs. Josselin. You don't neither of you understand. How should you?

Mrs. Strongtharm (*stung*). I understand as wall as a fool, I should hope. (*She turns to Miss Quiney.*) 'Twas a nat'ral wish in ye, ma'am, that such a piece

o' loveliness should bear just such another. But wait a while; they're young and there's time. . . . My lady wants a boy first, like every true woman that loves her lord. There's pride an' wonder in it. All her life belike she's felt herself weak an' shivered to think of battles, and now, lo an' behold, she's the very gates o' strength with an army marchin' forth to conquer the world. Ha'n't ye never caught your breath an' felt the tears swellin' when ye saw a regiment swing up the street?

Miss Quiney. Ah! . . . Is it like that?

Mrs. Strongtharm. It's like all that, an' more. . . . An' though I've wet my pillow afore now with envy of it, I thank the Lord for givin' a barren woman the knowledge.

A pause.

Mrs. Josselin (*with a silly laugh*). What wonderful patterns they make in the carpets nowadays! Look at this one, now—runnin' in and out so that the eye can't hardly follow it; and all for my lord's dressing-room! Cost a hundred pound, I shouldn't wonder.

Mrs. Strongtharm. T'cht!

Mrs. Josselin. He must be amazing fond of her. Fancy, my Ruth! . . . It's a pity he's not home, to take the child.

Mrs. Strongtharm. Men at these times are best out o' the way.

Mrs. Josselin. When my first was born, Michael—that's my husband—stayed home from sea o' purpose to take it. My first was a girl. No, not Ruth; Ruth was born after my man died, and I had her christened Ruth because some one told me it stood for "sorrow." I had three before Ruth—a girl an' two boys, an' buried them all.

Miss Quiney (*listening*). Hush!

Mrs. Josselin (*not hearing, immersed in her own reflections*). If you call a child by a sorrowful name it's apt to ward off the ill-luck. Look at Ruth now—christened in sorrow an' married, after all, to the richest in the land!

Miss Quiney (*in desperation*). Oh, hush! hush!

A low moan comes from the next room. The women sit silent, their faces white in the dawn that now comes stealing in at the window, conquering the candle-light by little and little.

Mrs. Strongtharm. I thought I heard a child's cry. . . . They cry at once.

Miss Quiney. Ah? I fancied it, too—a feeble one.

Mrs. Strongtharm (*rising after a long pause*). Something is wrong. . . .

As she goes to listen at the door, it opens, and the man-midwife enters. His face is grave.

Mrs. Strongtharm and Miss Quiney ask him together, under their breath—Well?

He answers: It is well. We have saved her life, I trust.

—And the child?

—A boy. It lived less than a minute. . . . Yet a shapely child. . . .

Miss Quiney clasps her hands. Shall she, within her breast, thank God? She cannot. She hears the voice saying,—

A very shapely child. . . . But the labour was difficult. There was some pressure on the brain, some lesion.

They would have denied Ruth sight of the poor little body, but she stretched out her arms for it and insisted. Then as she held it, flesh of her flesh, to her breast and felt it cold, she—she, whose courage had bred wonder in them, even awe—she who had smiled between her pangs, murmuring pretty thanks—wailed low, and, burying her face, lay still.

CHAPTER VI

CHILDLESS MOTHER

In the sad and cheated days that followed, she, with the milk of motherhood wasting in her, saw with new eyes—saw many things heretofore hidden from her.

She did not believe in any scriptural God. But she believed—she could not help believing—in an awful Justice overarching all human life with its law, as it overarched the very stars in heaven. And this law she believed to rest in goodness, accessible to the pure conscience, but stern against the transgressor.

Because she believed this, she had felt that the marriage rite, with such an one as Mr. Silk as intercessor between her vows and a clean Heaven, could be but a sullying of marriage. Yes, and she felt it still; of this, at any rate, she was sure.

But in her pride—as truly she saw it, in her pride of chastity—she had left the child out of account. *He* had inherited the world to face, not armed with her weapon of scorn. *He* had not won freedom through a scourge. He had grown to his fate in her womb, and in the womb she had betrayed him.

She had been blind, blind! She had lived for her lover and herself. To him and to her (it had seemed) this warm, transitory life belonged; a fleeting space of

time, a lodge leased to bliss. . . . Now she fronted the truth, that between the selfish rapture of lovers Heaven slips a child, smiling at the rapture, provident for the race. Now she read the secret of woman's nesting instinct; the underlying wisdom stirring the root of it, awaking passion not to satisfy passion, but that the world may go on and on to its unguessed ends. Now she could read ironically the courtship of man and maid, dallying by river-paths, beside running water overarched by boughs that had protected a thousand such courtships. Each pair in turn—poor fools!—had imagined the world theirs, compressed into their grasp; whereas the wise world was merely flattering, coaxing them, preparing for the child.

She should have been preparing, too. For what are women made but for motherhood? She? She had had but a hand to turn, a word to utter, and this child—healthily begotten, if ever child was, and to claim, if ever child could, the best—has broken triumphing through the gate of her travail. But she had betrayed him. The new-born spirit had arrived expectant, had cast one look across the threshold, and with one wail had fled. Through and beyond her answering wail, as she laid her head on the pillow, she heard the lost feet, the small betrayed feet, pattering away into darkness.

When she grew stronger, it consoled her a little to talk with Mrs. Strongtharm; not confiding her regrets

and self-reproaches, but speculating much on this great book of Maternity into which she had been given a glimpse. The metaphor was Mrs. Strongtharm's.

"Ay," said that understanding female, "a book you may call it, and a wonderful one; written by all the women, white an' black, copper-skin an' red-skin, that ever groped their way in it with pangs an' joys; for every one writes in it as well as reads. What's more, 'tis all in one language, though they come, as my man would say, from all the airts o' Babel."

"I wonder," mused Ruth, "if somewhere in it there's a chapter would tell me why, when I lie awake and think of my lost one, 'tis his footsteps I listen for—feet that never walked!"

"Hush ye, now. . . . Isn't it always their feet, the darlings! Don't the sound of it, more'n their voices, call me to door a dozen times a day? . . . I never bore child; but I made garments in hope o' one. Tell me, when you knitted his little boots, wasn't it different from all the rest?"

"Ah, put them away!"

"To be sure, dearie, to be sure—all ready for the next."

"I shall never have another child."

Mrs. Strongtharm smiled tolerantly.

"Never," Ruth repeated; "never; I know it."

With the same assurance of prophecy she answered her lover on his return, a bare two months later.

"But you must have known. . . . Even your letters kept it secret. Yet, had you written, the next ship would have brought me. Surely you did not doubt *that?*"

"No."

"Then why did you not tell me?"

It was the inevitable question. She had forestalled it so often in her thoughts that, when uttered at last, it gave her a curious sensation of re-enacting some long-past scene.

"I thought you did not care for children."

He was pacing the room. He halted, and stared at her in sheer astonishment. Many a beautiful woman touches the height of her beauty after the birth of her first child; and this woman had never stood before him in loveliness that, passing comprehension, so nearly touched the divine. But her perversity passed comprehension yet farther.

"Do you call that an answer?" he demanded.

"No. . . . You asked, and I had to say something; but it is no answer. Forgive me. It was the best I could find."

He still eyed her, between wrath and admiration.

"I think," she said, after a pause, "the true answer is just that I did wrongly—wrongly for the child's sake."

"That's certain. And your own?"

"My own? That does not seem to me to count so

much. . . . Neither of us believe that a priest can hallow marriage; but once I felt that the touch of a certain one could defile it."

"You have never before reproached me with that."

"Nor mean to now. I chose to run from him; but, dear, I do not ask to run from the consequences."

"The blackguard has had his pretty revenge. Langton told me of it. . . . All the prudes of Boston gather up their skirts, he says."

"What matter? Are we not happier missing them? . . . Honester, surely, and by that much at any rate the happier."

"Marry me, and I promise to force them all back to your feet."

She laughed quietly, almost to herself, a little wearily. "Can you not see, my dear lord, that I ask for no such triumph. It is good of you—oh, I see how good!—to desire it for me. But did we want these people in our forest days?"

"One cannot escape the world," he muttered.

"What? Not when the world is so quick to cast one out?"

"Ruth," he said, coming and standing close to her, "I do not believe you have given me the whole answer even yet. The true reason, please!"

"Must a woman give all her reasons? . . . She follows her fate, and at each new turning she may have a dozen, all to be forgotten at the next."

"I am sure you harbour some grudge—some reservation?" His eyes questioned her.

She kept him waiting for some seconds.

"My lord, women have no consistency but in this—they are jealous when they love. As your slave, I demand nothing; as your love, I demand only you. But if you wished also to set me high among women, you should have given me all or nothing. . . . You did not offer to take me with you. I was not worthy to be shown to that proud folk, your family."

"If you had breathed a wish, even the smallest hint of one——"

"I had no wish, save that you should offer it. I had only some pride. I was—I am—well content; only do not come back and offer me these women of Boston, or anything second best in your eyes, however much the gift may cost you."

"Have it as you will," said he, after a long pause. "I was wrong, and I beg your pardon. But I was less wrong than your jealousy suspects. . . . They will welcome you. Forgive me that I thought it well—that it might save you any chance of humiliation—to prepare them."

She swept him a curtsy. "They are very good," she said.

He detected the irony, yet he persisted, holding his temper well in control. "But all this presupposes, you see, that you marry me. . . . Ruth, you confess

that you were wrong, for the child's sake. He is dead; and, on the whole, so much the better, poor mite! But for another, should another be born——"

"There would be time," she said quietly. "But we shall never have another."

She had hardened strangely. It was as if the milk of motherhood, wasting in her, had packed itself in a crust about her heart. He loved her; she never ceased to love him; but whereas under the public scourge something had broken, letting her free of opinion, to love the good and hate the evil for their own sakes, under this second and more mysterious visitation, she kept her courage indeed, but certainty was hers no longer; nor was she any longer free of opinion, but hardened her heart against it consciously, as against an enemy.

Not otherwise can I account for the image of Ruth Josselin—my Lady Vyell—Lady Good-for-Nothing—as under these various names it flits, for the next few years, through annals, memoirs, correspondence, scandalous chronicles; now vindicated, now glanced at with unseemly nods and becks, anon passionately denounced; now purely shining, now balefully, above and between the clouds of those times; but always a star and an object of wonder.

"In all Massachusetts," writes the Reverend Hiram Williams, B.D., in his tract entitled *A Shoe Over Edom*,

"was no stronghold of Satan to compare with that built on a slope to the rearward of Boston, by Sir O—— V——, Baronet. Here with a woman, born of this Colony, of passing wit and beauty (both alike the dower of the Evil One), he kept house to the scandal of all devout persons, entertaining none but professed Enemies of our Liberties, Atheists, Gamesters." Here one may pause and suspect the reverend castigator of confusing several dislikes in one argument. It is done sometimes, even in our own day, by religious folk who polemise in politics. "Cards they played on the Sabbath. Plays they rehearsed too, by Shakespeare, Dryden, Congreve and others, whose names may guarantee their lewdness. . . . The woman, I have said, was fair; but of that sort their feet go down ever to Hell. . . ."

"My Noll's *Belle Sauvage*," writes Langton to Walpole, "continues a riddle. I shall never solve it; yet 'till I have solved it, expect me not. 'Tis certain she loves him; and because she loves him, her loyalty allows not hint of sadness even to me, his best friend. Guess why she likes me? 'Tis because (I am sure of it) even in the old clouded days I never took money from Noll, nor borrowed a shilling that I didn't repay within the week. She is a puzzle, I say; but somehow the key lies in this—*She is a woman that pays her debts.*

"They sail for Europe next spring; but not, as I understand for England, where his family will not

receive her, and where by consequence he will not expose her to their slights. If I have made you impatient to set eyes on her, you must e'en pack and pay that long-promised visit to Florence. She is worth the pilgrimage."

They sailed in the early spring of 1752—Langton with them—and duly came to port in the Tagus. From Lisbon, after a short stay, they travelled to Paris, and from Paris across Switzerland to Italy, visiting in turn Turin, Venice, Ravenna, Florence, Rome, Naples, and returning from that port to Lisbon, where (the situation so charmed him) Sir Oliver bought and furnished a villa overlooking the Tagus.

As she passes through Paris we get a glimpse of her in the Memoirs of that agreeable rattle, Arnauld de Jouy:—

"I must not forget to tell of an amusing little comedy of error played at the Opera-house this season (1752). All Paris was agog to see the famous English—or rather Irish—beauty, my Lady Coventry, newly arrived in the Capital. She was one of the Gunning sisters, over whom all London had already lost its head so wildly that I am assured a shoemaker made no small sum by exhibiting their *pantoufles* to the porters and chairmen at three sous a gaze. . . . On a certain night, then, it was rumoured that she would pay her first visit to the Opera,

but none could say whose box she intended to honour. . . . It turned out to be the Duc de Luxembourg's, and upon my lady's entrance—a little late—the whole audience rose to its feet in homage, though Visconti happened just then to be midway in an *aria*. The singer faltered at the interruption, perplexed; her singing stopped, and lifting her eyes to the lines of boxes she dropped a sweeping curtsy—to the opposite side of the house! . . . All eyes turn, and behold! right opposite to Beauty Number One, into the box of Mme. the Maréchale de Lowendahl, there has just entered a Beauty Number Two, not one whit less fair—so regally fair indeed that the audience, yet standing, turn from one to the other, uncertain which to salute. Nor were they resolved when the act closed.

"Meantime my Lady Coventry (for in truth the first-comer was she) has sent her husband out to the *foyer*, to make enquiries. He comes back and reports her to be the lady of Sir Oliver Vyell, a great American Governor [But here we detect de Jouy in a slight error] newly arrived from his Province; that she is by birth an American, and has never visited Europe before. 'She must be Pocohontas herself, then,' says the Gunning, and very prettily sends across after the second act, desiring the honour of her acquaintance. Nay, this being granted, she goes herself to the Maréchale's box, and the pair sit together in full view of all—a superb challenge, and made with no show (as I believe, with

no feeling) of jealousy. The audience is entranced. . . . Report said later that my Lady Coventry, who was given to these small indiscretions, asked almost in her first breath, yet breathlessly, her rival's age. Her rival smiled and told it. 'Then you are older than I—but how long have you been married?' This, too, her rival told her. 'Then,' sighed the Gunning, 'perhaps you do not love your lord as I love my Cov. It *is* wearing to the looks; but 'faith, I cannot help it!'"

From Lisbon Sir Oliver paid several flying visits to England, where his suit against Lady Caroline still dragged. Nor was it concluded until the summer of 1754, when the *Gentleman's Magazine* yields us the following:—

"*June* 4. A cause between Sir Oliver Vyell, baronet, plaintiff, and the lady of the late Sir Thomas, defendant, was tried in the Court of King's Bench by a special jury. The subject of the litigation was a will of Sit Thomas, suspected to be made when he was not of sound mind; and it appeared that he had made three—one in 1741, another in 1744, and a third in 1746. In the first only a slender provision was made for his lady, by the second a family estate in Devonshire, of £2,000 per annum, was given her for her life, and by the third the whole estate real and personal was left

to be disposed of at her discretion without any provision for the heir-at-law. The jury, after having withdrawn for about an hour and a half, set aside the last and confirmed the second. In a hearing before the Lord Chancellor some time afterwards in relation to the costs, it was deemed that the lady should pay them all, both at common law and in Chancery."

Thus we see our Ruth by glimpses in these years which were far from being the best or the happiest of her life—"an innocent life, yet far astray."

But one letter of hers abides, kept in contrition by the woman to whom she wrote it, and in this surely the noble soul of her mounts like a star and shines, clear above the wreck of her life.

"My dear Mrs. Harry,—Let there be few words between us. My child did not live, and I shall never bear my lord another; therefore, outside of your feelings and mine, what you did or left undone matters not at all in this world. You talk of the next, and there you go beyond me; but if there be a next world, and my forgiveness can help you there, why you had it long ago! . . . 'You reproach yourself constantly,' you say; 'You should have told him and you withheld the letter;' 'You did wickedly'—and the rest. Oh, my dear, will you not see that I have been a mother, too, and under-

stand? In your place I might have done the same. Yes? No? At any rate I should have known the temptation.

"Yours affectionately,

"RUTH."

The law business ended, she and Sir Oliver sailed for Boston and spent a few weeks at Eagles. He had resigned the Collectorship of Customs, but with no intent to return and make England his home. His attachment to Eagles had grown; he was perpetually making fresh plans to enlarge and adorn it; and he proposed henceforth, laying aside all official cares, to spend his summers in New England, his winters in the softer climate of Lisbon.

BOOK V

LISBON AND AFTER

CHAPTER I

ACT OF FAITH

"How is it possible for people beholding that glorious Body to worship any Being but Him who created it!"

Upon the stroke of nine the procession filed forth into the Square. It was headed by about a hundred Dominican friars, bearing the banner of their founder. The banner displayed a Cross betwixt an olive tree and a sword, with the motto *Justitia et Misericordia.*

After the Dominicans walked five penitents; each with a sergeant, or Familiar, attending. Two of the five wore black mitres, three were bareheaded. All walked barefoot, clad in black sleeveless coats, and each carried a long wax candle. These had escaped the extreme sentence; and after them came one, a woman, who had escaped it also, but narrowly and as by fire. In token of this her black robe was painted over with flames, having their points turned downward.

Close behind followed three men on whose san-benitos the flames pointed upward. These were being led to execution, and two of them who carried boards on their breasts, painted with dogs and serpents, were to die by fire for having professed doctrines contrary to the

Faith; the third, who carried no board, was a "Relapsed," and might look forward to the privilege of being strangled before being cast to the flame. To each of these three was assigned, in addition to the Familiar, a couple of Jesuit priests, to walk beside him and exhort him.

The man who was to be strangled came through the gateway of the Inquisition Office with his gaze bent to the ground, apparently insensible to the mob of sightseers gathered in the Square. The doomed man who followed—a mere youth, and, by his face, a Jew—stared about him fiercely and eagerly. The third was an old man, with ragged hair and beard, and a complexion bleached by long imprisonment in the dark. He halted, blinking, uncertain how to plant his steps. Then, feeling rather than seeing the sun, he stretched up both arms to it, dropping his taper, calling aloud as might a preacher, "How is it possible for people, beholding that glorious Body, to worship any Being but Him who created it."

A Jesuit at his side flung an arm across the old man's mouth; and as quickly the Familiar whipped out a cloth, pulled his head back, and gagged him. The young Jew had turned and was staring, still with his fierce, eager look. He was wheeled about and plucked forward.

Next through the gateway issued a troupe of Familiars on horseback, some of them nobles of the first

families of Portugal; after them the Inquisitors and other Officers of the Court upon mules; last of all, amid a train of nobles, the Inquisitor-General himself on a white horse led by two grooms: his delicate hands resting on the reins, his face a pale green by reason of the sunlight falling on it through a silken scarf of that colour pendant over the brim of his immense black hat.

All this passed before Ruth's eyes, and close, as she sat in the mule-chaise beside Sir Oliver. She would have drawn the leathern curtains, but he had put out a hand forbidding this.

She could not at any rate have escaped hearing the old man's exclamation; for their chaise was jammed in the crowd beside the gateway. Her ears still kept the echo of his vibrant voice; almost she was persuaded that his eyes had singled her out from the crowd.

—And why not? Had not she, also, cause to know what cruelties men will commit in the name of religion?

Her heart was wrathful as well as pitiful. Her lord had given her no warning of the auto-da-fé, and she now suspected that in suggesting this Sunday morning drive he had purposely decoyed her to it. Presently, as the crowd began to clear, he confirmed the suspicion.

"Since we are here, we may as well see the sp—"

He was going to say "sport," but, warned by a sudden stiffening of her body, he corrected the word to "spectacle." "They erect a grand stand on these occasions; or, if you prefer, we can bribe them to give room for the chaise."

He bent forward and called to the coachman, "Turn the mules' heads, and follow!"

"Indeed I will not," she said firmly. "Do you go—if such crimes amuse you. . . . For me, I shall walk home."

He shrugged his shoulders. "It is the custom of the country. . . . But, as for your walking, I cannot allow it for a moment. Juan shall drive you home."

She glanced at him. His eyes were fixed on the opposite side of the Square, and she surprised in them a look of recognition not intended for her. Following the look, she saw a chaise much like their own, moving slowly with the throng, and in it a woman seated.

Ruth knew her. She was Donna Maria, Countess of Montalagre; and of late Sir Oliver's name had been much coupled with hers.

This Ruth did not know; but she had guessed for some time that he was unfaithful. She had felt no curiosity at all to learn the woman's name. Now an accident had opened her eyes, and she saw.

Her first feeling was of slightly contemptuous amusement. Donna Maria, youthful wife of an aged and enfeebled lord, passed for one of the extremely devout.

She had considerable beauty, but of an order Ruth could easily afford to scorn. It was the *bizarrerie* of the affair that tickled her, almost to laughter—Donna Maria's down-dropt gaze, the long lashes veiling eyes too holy-innocent for aught but the breviary; and he—he of all men!—playing the lover to this little dunce, with her empty brain, her narrow religiosity!

But on afterthought, she found it somewhat disgusting too.

"I thank you," she said. "Juan shall drive me home, then. It will not, I hope, inconvenience you very much, since I see the Countess of Montalagre's carriage across the way. No doubt she will offer you a seat."

He glanced at her, but her face was cheerfully impassive.

"That's an idea!" he said. "I will run and make interest with her."

He alighted, and gave Juan the order to drive home. He lifted his hat, and left her. She saw Donna Maria's start of simulated surprise. Also she detected, or thought she detected, the sly triumph of a woman who steals a man.

All this she had leisure to observe; for Juan, a Gallician, was by no means in a hurry to turn the mules' heads for home. He had slewed his body about, and was gazing wistfully after the throng.

"Your Excellency, it would be a thousand pities——"

"Hey?"

"There has not been a finer burning these two years, they tell me. And that old blasphemer's beard, when they set a light to it! . . . I am a poor Gallego, your Excellency, and at home get so few chances of enjoyment. Also I have dropped my whip, and it is trodden on, broken. In the crowd at the Terreiro de Paço I may perchance borrow another."

Ruth alighted in a blaze of wrath.

"Wretched man," she commanded, "climb down!"

"Your Excellency——"

"Climb down! You shall go, as your betters have gone, to feed your eyes with these abominations. . . . Nay, how shall I scold you, who do what your betters teach? But climb down, I will drive the mules myself."

"His Excellency will murder me when he hears of it. But, indeed, was ever such a thing heard of?—" Nevertheless the man was plainly in two minds.

"It is not for you to argue, but to obey my orders."

He descended, still protesting. She mounted to his seat, and took the reins and whip.

"The brutes are spirited, your Excellency. For the love of God have a care of them!"

For answer she flicked them with the whip—he had lied about the broken whip—and left him staring.

The streets were deserted. All Lisbon had trooped to the auto-da-fé. If any saw and wondered at the sight of a lady driving like a mere *bolhero*, she heeded

not. The mules trotted briskly, and she kept them to it.

She had ceased to be amused, even scornfully. As she drove up the slope of Buenos Ayres—the favourite English suburb, where his villa stood overlooking Tagus—a deep disgust possessed her. It darkened the sunshine. It befouled; it tarnished the broad and noble mirror of water spread far below.

"Were all men beasts, then?"

CHAPTER II

DONNA MARIA

THEY would dine at four o'clock. On Sundays Sir Oliver chose to dine informally with a few favoured guests; and these to-day would make nine, not counting Mr. Langton, who might be reckoned one of the household.

By four o'clock all had arrived—the British envoy, Mr. Castres, with his lady; Lord Charles Douglas, about to leave Lisbon after a visit of pleasure; Mrs. Hake, a sister of Governor Hardy of New York—she, with an invalid husband and two children, occupied a villa somewhat lower down the slope of Buenos Ayres; white-haired old Colonel Arbuthnot, *doyen* of the English residents; Mr. Hay, British Consul, and Mr. Raymond, one of the chiefs of the English factory, with their wives. . . . Ruth looked at the clock. All were here save only their host, Sir Oliver.

Mr. Langton, with Lord Charles Douglas, had returned from the auto-da-fé. Like his friend George Selwyn—friend these many years by correspondence only—Mr. Langton was a dilettante in executions and like horrors, and had taken Lord Charles to the show, to initiate him. He reported that they had left Sir

Oliver in a press of the crowd, themselves hurrying away on foot. He would doubtless arrive in a few minutes. Mr. Langton said nothing of the executions.

Mr. Castres, too, ignored them. He knew, of course, that the auto-da-fé had taken place, and that the Court had witnessed it in state from a royal box. But his business, as tactful Envoy of a Protestant country, was to know nothing of this. He went on talking with Mrs. Hake, who—good soul—actually knew nothing of it. Her children absorbed all her care; and having heard Miriam, the younger, cough twice that morning, she was consulting the Envoy on the winter climate of Lisbon—was it, for instance, prophylactic against croup.

At five minutes past four Sir Oliver arrived. Before apologising he stood aside ceremoniously in the doorway to admit a companion—the Countess of Montalagre.

"I have told them," said he as Donna Maria tripped forward demurely to shake hands, "to lay for the Countess. The business was long, by reason of an interminable sermon, and at the end there was a crush at the exit from the Terreiro de Paço and a twenty good minutes' delay—impossible to extricate oneself. Had I not persuaded the Countess to drive me all the way home, my apologies had been a million instead of the thousand I offer."

Had he brought the woman in defiance? Or was it merely to discover how much, if anything, Ruth sus-

pected? If to discover, his design had no success. Ruth saw—it needed less than half a glance—Batty Langton bite his lip and turn to the window. Lord Charles wore a faintly amused smile. These two knew, at any rate. For the others she could not be sure. She greeted Donna Maria with a gentle courtesy.

"We will delay dinner with pleasure," she said, "while my waiting-woman attends on you."

During the few minutes before the Countess reappeared she conversed gaily with one and another of her guests. Her face had told him nothing, and her spirit rose on the assurance that, at least, she was puzzling him.

Yet all the while she asked herself the same questions. Had he done this to defy her? Or to sound her suspicions?

In part he was defying her; as he proved at table by talking freely of the auto-da-fé. Donna Maria sat at his right hand, and added a detail here and there to his description. The woman apparently had no pity in her for the unhappy creatures she had seen slowly and exquisitely murdered. Were they not heretics, serpents, enemies of the true Faith?

"But ah!" she cried once with pretty affectation. "You make me forget my manners! . . . Am I not, even now, talking of these things among Lutherans? Your good lady, for instance?"

At the far end of the table, Ruth—talking across Mr. Castres and engaging Mrs. Hake's ear, lest it should be attracted by this horrible conversation—discussed the coming war with France. She upheld that the key of it lay in America. He maintained that India held it—"Old England, you may trust her; money's her blood, and the blood she scents in a fight. She'll fasten on India like a bulldog." Colonel Arbuthnot applauded. "Where the treasure is," quoted Ruth, "there the heart is also. You give it a good British paraphrase. . . . But her real blood—some of the best of it—beats in America. There the French challenge her, and she'll have, spite of herself, to take up the challenge. Montcalm! . . . He means to build an empire there" "Pardon me"—Mr. Castres smiled indulgently—"you are American born, and see all things American in a high light. We skirmish there . . . backwoods fighting, you may call it."

"With a richer India at the back of the woods. Oh! I trust England, and Pitt, when his hour comes. England reminds me of Saul, always going forth to discover a few asses and always in the end discovering a kingdom. Other nations build the dream, dreams being no gift of hers. Then she steps in, thrusts out the dreamers, inherits the reality. America, though you laugh at it, has cost the best dreaming of two nations—Spain first, and now France—and the best of both. Bating Joan of Arc—a woman—France

hasn't bred a finer spirit than Montcalm's since she bred Froissart's men. But to what end? England will break that great heart of his."

She was talking for talking's sake, only anxious to divert Mrs. Hake's ears from the conversation her own ears caught, only too plainly.

Mrs. Hake said, "I prefer to believe Mr. Castres. My brother writes that every one is quitting New York, and I'm only thankful—if war must come, over there—that we've taken our house on a three years' lease only. No one troubles about Portugal, and I must say that I've never found a city to compare with Lisbon. The suburbs! . . . Why, this very morning I saw the city itself one pall of smoke. You'd have thought a main square was burning. Yet up here, in Buenos Ayres, it might have been midsummer. . . . The children, playing in the garden, called me out to look at the smoke. *Was* there a fire? I must ask Sir Oliver."

Mrs. Hake had raised her voice; but Ruth managed to intercept the question.

All the while she was thinking, thinking to herself.—"And he, who can speak thus, once endured shame to shield me! He laughs at things infinitely crueller. . . . Yet they differ in degree only from what then stirred him to fight.

—"Have I then so far worsened him? Is the blame mine?

—"Or did the curse but delay to work in him?—in him, my love and my hero? Was it foreordained to come to this, though I would at any time have given my life to prevent it?"

Again she thought.—"I have been wrong in holding religion to be the great cause why men are cruel,—as in believing that free-thought must needs humanise us all. Strange! that I should discover my error on this very day has showed me men being led by religion to deaths of torture. . . . Yet an error it must be. For see my lord—hear how he laughs as cruelly, even, as the *dévote* at his elbow!"

They had loitered some while over dessert, and Ruth's eye sought Donna Maria's, to signal her before rising and leaving the gentlemen to their wine. But Donna Maria was running a preoccupied glance around the table and counting with her fingers. . . . Presently the glance grew distraught and the silly woman fell back in her chair with a cry.

"Jesus! We are thirteen!"

"Faith, so we are," said Sir Oliver with an easy laugh, after counting.

"And I the uninvited one! The calamity must fall on *me*—there is no other way!"

"But indeed there is another way," said Ruth, rising with a smile. "In my country the ill-luck falls on the first to leave the table. And who should that be, here, but the hostess?"

CHAPTER III

EARTHQUAKE

THE auto-da-fé was but a preliminary to the festivities and great processions of All Saints. For a whole week Lisbon had been sanding its squares and streets, painting its signboards, draping its balconies and windows to the fourth and fifth stories with hangings of crimson damask. Street after street displayed this uniform vista of crimson, foil for the procession, with its riot of gorgeous dresses, gold lace, banners, precious stones.

Ruth leaned on the balustrade of her villa garden, and looked down over the city, from which, made musical by distance, the bells of thirty churches called to High Mass. Their chorus floated up to her on the delicate air; and—for the chimneys of Lisbon were smokeless, the winter through, in all but severest weather, and the citizens did their cooking over braziers—each belfry stood up distinct, edged with gold by the brilliant morning sun. Aloft the sky spread its blue bland and transparent; far below her Tagus mirrored it in a lake of blue. Many vessels rode at anchor there. The villas to right and left and below

her, or so much of them as rose out of their embosoming trees, took the sunlight on walls of warm yellow, with dove-coloured shadows.

She was thinking. . . . He had tried to discover how much she suspected; and when neither in word or look would she lower her guard, he had turned defiant. This very morning he had told her that, if she cared to use it, a carriage was at her disposal. For himself, the Countess of Montalagre had offered him a seat in hers, and he had accepted. . . . He had told her this at the last moment, entering her room in the full court dress the state procession demanded; and he had said it with a studied carelessness, not meeting her eyes.

She had thanked him and added that she was in two minds about going. She was not dressed for the show, and doubted if her maid could array her in time.

"We go to the Cathedral," said he. "I should recommend that or the Church of St. Vincent, where, some say, the Mass is equally fine."

"If I go, I shall probably content myself with the procession."

"If that's so, I've no doubt Langton will escort you. He likes processions, though he prefers executions. To a religious service I doubt your bribing him."

Upon this they had parted, each well aware that, but a few weeks ago, this small expedition would have been planned together, discussed, shared, as a matter of course. At parting he kissed her hand—he had

always exquisite manners; and she wished him a pleasant day with a voice quite cheerful and unconstrained.

From the sunlit terrace she looked almost straight down upon the garden of Mrs. Hake's villa. The two little girls were at play there. She heard their voices, shrill above the sound of the church bells. Now and again she caught a glimpse of them, at hide-and-seek between the ilexes.

She was thinking. If only fate had given her children such as these! . . . As it was, she could show a brave face. But what could the future hold?

She heard their mother calling to them. They must have obeyed and run to her, for the garden fell silent of a sudden. The bells, too, were ceasing—five or six only tinkled on.

She leaned forward over the balustrade to make sure that the children were gone. As she did so, the sound of a whimper caught her ear. She looked down, and spoke soothingly to a small dog, an Italian greyhound, a pet of Mr. Langton's, that had run to her trembling, and was nuzzling against her skirt for shelter. She could not think what ailed the creature. Belike it had taken fright at a noise below the terrace—a rumbling noise, as of a cart mounting the hill heavily laden with stones.

The waggon, if waggon it were, must be on the roadway to the left. Again she leaned forward over the balustrade. A faint tremor ran through the stonework on which her arms rested. For a moment she fancied it some trick of her own pulse.

But the tremor was renewed. The pulsation was actually in the stonework. . . . And then, even while she drew back, wondering, the terrace under her feet heaved as though its pavement rested on a wave of the sea. She was thrown sideways, staggering; and while she staggered, saw the great flagstones of the terrace raise themselves on end, as notes of a harpsichord when the fingers withdraw their pressure.

She would have caught again at the balustrade. But it had vanished, or rather was vanishing, under her gaze, toppling into the garden below. The sound of the falling stones was caught up in a long, low rumble, prolonged, swelling to a roar from the city below. Again the ground heaved, and beneath her—she had dropped on her knees, and hung, clutching the little dog, staring over a level verge where the balustrade had run—she saw Lisbon fall askew, this way and that: the roofs collapsing, like a toy structure of cards. Still the roar of it swelled on the ear; yet, strange to say, the roar seemed to have nothing to do with the collapse, which went on piecemeal, steadily, like a game. The crescendo was drowned in a sharper roar and a crash close behind her—a crash that seemed the end of all

things. . . . The house! She had not thought of the house. Turning, she faced a cloud of dust, and above it saw, before the dust stung her eyes, half-blinding her, that the whole front of the villa had fallen outwards. It had, in fact, fallen and spread its ruin within two yards of her feet. Had the terrace been by that much narrower, she must have been destroyed. As it was, above the dust, she gazed, unhurt, into a house from which the front screen had been sharply caught away, as a mask snatched from a face.

By this the horror had become a dream to her. As in a dream she saw one of her servants—a poor little under-housemaid, rise to her knees from the floor where she had been flung, totter to the edge of the house-front, and stand, piteously gazing down over a height impossible to leap.

A man's voice shouted. Around the corner of the house, from the stables, Mr. Langton came running, by a bare moment escaping death from a mass of masonry that broke from the parapet, and crashed to the ground close behind his heels.

"Lady Vyell! Where is Lady Vyell?"

Ruth called to him, and he scrambled towards her over the gaping pavement. He called as he came, but she could distinguish no words, for within the last few seconds another and different sound had grown on the ear—more terrible even than the first roar of ruin.

"My God! look!" He was at her side, shouting in her ear, for a wind like a gale was roaring past them down from the hills. With one hand he steadied her against it, lest it should blow her over the verge. His other pointed out over Tagus.

She stared. She did not comprehend; she only saw that a stroke more awful than any was falling, or about to fall. The first convulsion had lifted the river bed, leaving the anchored ships high and dry. Some lay canted almost on their beam ends. As the bottom sank again they slowly righted, but too late; for the mass of water, flung to the opposite shore, and hurled back from it, came swooping with a refluent wave, that even from this high hillside was seen to be monstrous. It fell on their decks, drowning and smothering: their masts only were visible above the smother, some pointing firmly, others tottering and breaking. Some rose no more. Others, as the great wave passed on, lurched up into sight again, broken, dismasted, wrenched from their moorings, spinning about aimlessly, tossed like corks amid the spume; and still, its crest arching, its deep note gathering, the great wave came on straight for the harbour quay.

Ruth and Langton, staring down on this portent, did not witness the end; for a dense cloud of dust, on this upper side dun-coloured against the sunlight, interposed itself between them and the city, over which it made a total darkness. Into that darkness the

great wave passed and broke; and almost in the moment of its breaking a second tremor shook the hillside. Then, indeed, wave and earthquake together made universal roar, drowning the last cry of thousands; for before it died away earthquake and wave together had turned the harbour quay of Lisbon bottom up, and engulfed it. Of all the population huddled there to escape from death in the falling streets, not a corpse ever rose to the surface of Tagus.

But Ruth saw nothing of this. She clung to Langton, and his arm was about her. She believed, with so much of her mind as was not paralysed, that the end of the world was come.

As the infernal hubbub died away on the dropping wind, she glanced back over her shoulder at the house. The poor little *criada-moca* was no longer there, peering over the edge she dared not leap. Nay, the house was no longer there—only three gaunt walls, and between them a heap where rooms, floors, roof had collapsed together.

Of a sudden complete silence fell about them. As her eyes travelled along the edge of the terrace where the balustrade had run, but ran no longer, she had a sensation of standing on the last brink of the world, high over nothingness. Langton's arm still supported her.

"As safe here as anywhere," she heard him saying. "For the chance that led you here, thank whatever Gods may be."

"But I must find him!" she cried.

"Eh? Noll?—find Noll? Dear lady, small chance of that!"

"I must find him."

"He was to attend High Mass in the Cathedral——"

"Yes . . . with that woman. What help could such an one bring to him if—if— Oh, I must find him, I say."

"The Cathedral," he repeated. "You are brave; let your own eyes look for it." He had withdrawn his arm.

"Yet I must search, and you shall search with me. You were his friend, I think?"

"Indeed, I even believed so. . . . I was thinking of *you*. . . . It is almost certain death. Do you say that he is worth it?"

"Do you fear death?" she asked.

"Moderately," he answered. "Yet if you command me, I come; if you go, I go with you."

"Come."

CHAPTER IV

THE SEARCH

THEY set out hand in hand. The small dog ran with them.

Even the beginning of the descent was far from easy, for the high walls that had protected the villa-gardens of Buenos Ayres lay in heaps, cumbering the roadway, and in places obliterating it.

About a hundred and fifty yards down the road, by what had been the walled entrance to the Hakes' garden, they sighted two forlorn small figures—the six and five year old Hake children, Sophie and Miriam, who recognised Ruth and, running, clung to her skirts.

"Mamma! Where is mamma?"

"Dears, where did you leave her last?"

"She pushed us out through the gateway, here, and told us to stand in the middle of the road while she ran back to call daddy. She said no stones could fall on us here. But she has been gone ever so long, and we can't hear her calling at all."

While Ruth gathered them to her and attempted to console them, Mr. Langton stepped within the ruined

gateway. In a minute or so he came back, and his face was grave.

She noted it. "What can we do with them?" she asked, and added with a haggard little smile, "I had actually begun to tell them to run up to our house and wait, forgetting——"

"They had best wait here, as their mother advised."

"It is terrible!"

He lifted his shoulders slightly. "If once we begin——"

"No, you are right," she said, with a shuddering glance down the road; and bade the little ones rest still as their mother had commanded. She was but going down to the city (she said) to see if the danger was as terrible down there. The two little ones cried and clung to her; but she put them aside firmly, promising to look for their mamma when she returned. Langton did not dare to glance at her face.

The dark cloud dust met them, a gunshot below, rolling up the hillside from the city. They passed within the fringe of it, and at once the noonday sun was darkened for them. In the unnatural light they picked their way with difficulty.

"She was lying close within the entrance," said Langton. "The gateway arch must have fallen on her as she turned. . . . One side of her skull was broken. I pulled down some branches and covered her."

"Your own face is bleeding."

"Is it?" He put up a hand. "Yes—I remember, a brick struck me, on my way from the stables—no, a beam grazed me as I ran for the back-stairs, meaning to get you out that way. The stairs were choked. . . . I made sure you were in the house. The horses . . . have you ever heard a horse scream?"

She shivered. At a turn of the road they came full in view of the black pall stretching over the city. Flames shot up through it, here and there. Lisbon was on fire in half a dozen places at least, and now for the first time she became aware that the wind had sprung up again and was blowing violently. She could not remember when it started: the morning had been still, the Tagus—she recalled it—unruffled.

At the very foot of the hill they came on the first of three fires—two houses blazing furiously, and a whole side-street doomed, if the wind should hold. Among the ruins of a house, right in the face of the fire, squatted a dozen persons, men and women, all dazed by terror. The women had opened their parasols—possibly to screen their faces from the heat—albeit they might have escaped this quite easily by shifting their positions a few paces. None of these folk betrayed the smallest interest in Ruth or in Langton. Indeed, they scarcely lifted their eyes.

The suburbs were deserted, for the earthquake had surprised all Lisbon in a pack, crowded within its

churches, or in its central streets and squares. Yet the emptiness of what should have been the thoroughfares astonished them scarcely less than did the piles of masonry, breast-high in places, over which they picked their way in the uncanny twilight. They had scarcely passed beyond the glare of the burning houses when Langton stumbled over a corpse—the first they encountered. He drew Ruth aside from it, entreating her in a low voice to walk warily. But she had seen.

"We shall see many before we reach the Cathedral," she said quietly.

They stumbled on, meeting with few living creatures; and these few asked them no questions, but went by, stumbling, with hands groping, as though they moved in a dream. A voice wailed "Jesus! Jesus!" and the cry, issuing Heaven knew whence, shook Ruth's nerve for a moment. Once Langton plucked her by the arm and pointed to some men with torches moving among the ruins. She supposed that they were seeking for the dead; but they were, in fact, incendiaries, already at work and in search of loot.

She passed three or four of these blazing houses, some kindled no doubt by incendiaries, but others by natural consequences of the earthquake; for the kitchens, heated for the great feast, had communicated their fires to the falling timberwork on which the houses were framed; and by this time the city was on fire in at

least thirty different places. The scorched smell mingled everywhere with an odour of sulphur.

There were rents in the streets, too—chasms, half-filled with rubble, reaching right across the roadway. After being snatched back by Langton from the brink of one of these chasms, Ruth steeled her heart to be thankful when a burning house shed light for her footsteps. At the houses themselves, after an upward glance or two, she dared not look again. They leaned this way and that, the fronts of some thrust outward at an angle to forbid any but the foolhardiest from passing underneath.

But, indeed, they had little time to look aloft as they penetrated to streets littered, where the procession had passed, with wrecked chaises, dead mules, human bodies half-buried and half-burnt, charred limbs protruding awkwardly from heaps of stones. Here, by ones and twos, pedestrians tottered past, crying that the world was at an end; here, on a heap where, belike, his shop had stood, a man knelt praying aloud; here a couple of enemies met by chance, seeking their dead, and embraced, beseeching forgiveness for injuries past. These sights went by Ruth as in a dream; and as in a dream she heard the topple and crack of masonry to right and left. Langton guided her; and haggard, perspiring, they bent their heads to the strange wind now howling down the street as through a funnel, and foot by foot battled their way.

The wind swept over their bent heads, carrying flakes of fire to start new conflagrations. The stream of these flakes became so steady that Ruth began to count on it to guide her. She began to think that amid all this dissolution to right and left, some charm must be protecting them both, when, as he stretched a hand to help her across a mound of rubble she saw him turn, cast a look up and fall back beneath a rush of masonry. A flying brick struck her on the shoulder, cutting the flesh. For the rest, she stood unscathed; but her companion lay at her feet, with legs buried deep, body buried to the ribs.

"Your hand!" she gasped.

He stretched it out feebly, but withdrew it in an agony; for the stones crushed his bowels.

"You are hurt?"

"Killed." He contrived a smile. "Not so wide as a church door," he quoted, looking up at her strangely through the wan light; "but 'twill serve."

"My friend! and I cannot help you!" She plucked vainly at the mass of stones burying his legs.

He gasped on his anguish, and controlled it.

"Let be those silly stones. . . . They belong to some grocer's kitchen-chimney, belike—but they have killed me, and may as well serve for my tomb. Reach me your hand."

He took it and thrust it gently within the breast of

his waistcoat. There, guided by him, her fingers closed on the handle of a tiny stiletto.

"The sheath too . . . it is sewn by a few stitches only." He looked up into her eyes. "You are too beautiful to be wandering these streets alone."

"I understand," she said gravely.

"Now go." He pressed the back of her hand to his lips, and released it.

"Can I do nothing?" she asked, with a hard sob.

"Yes . . . 'tis unlucky, they say, to accept a knife without paying for it. One kiss. . . . You may tell Noll. Is it too high a price?"

She knelt and kissed him on the brow.

"Ah! . . ." He drew a long sigh. "I have held you to-day, and to-day you have kissed me. Go now."

She went. The dog ran with her a little way, then turned and crept back to its master.

CHAPTER V

THE FINDING

"HOLA!" hailed a man, signalling by a brazier with his back to the wind. "For what are you seeking?"

Ruth halted, gripping her stiletto. This man might help her, perhaps. At any rate, he seemed a cool-headed fellow who made the best of things.

For two hours she had searched, and for the time her strength was nearly spent. Dust filled her hair and caked her long eyelashes. Her face, haggard with woe and weariness, was a mask of dust.

"For one," she answered, "who was to have attended High Mass in the Cathedral."

"Eh?" The man swept a hand to the ruined shell of that building, at the end of the Square, and to a horrible pile of masonry covering many hundreds of bodies. "If he reached there, your Excellency had better go home and pray for his soul; that is, if your Excellency believes it efficacious. But first, will your Excellency sit here and rest?—no, not on the lee side, in the fumes of the charcoal, but to windward here, where the fire is bright, and where I have the honour to give

room. . . . So your Excellency did not attend the Mass—not approving of it, maybe?"

"It would seem that you know me?" said Ruth, answering something in his tone, not his words.

The question set him chuckling.

"Not by that token—though 'faith 'tis an ill wind blows nobody good. This earthquake, considered philosophically, is a great opportunity for heretics. You and I, for example, may sit here in the very middle of the Square and talk blasphemy to our heart's content; whereas—" He broke off. "But I forget my manners. I ought to have started by saying that no one, having once set eyes on your Excellency's face, could ever forget it; and, by St. James, that is no more than the truth!"

"Where have you seen me before?"

"By the gateway of the Holy Office, in a carriage with your lord beside you. I marked his face, too. What it is to be young and rich and beautiful! . . . And yet you might have remembered me, seeing that I made part of the procession, though—praise be to fate!—a modest one."

Ruth gazed at him. "I remember you," she said slowly; "you were one of the Penitents."

"They were gracious enough to call me so. Yes, I can understand that a san-benito makes some difference to a man's personal appearance. . . . And old Gonsalvez—I saw your Excellency wince and your

Excellency's beauty turn pale when he cast up his hands to the sun. . . . Hey? *How is it possible*—how went the words?"

Ruth had them well by heart. "*How is it possible for people, beholding that glorious Body, to worship any Being but Him who created it?*"

"Right—word for word! Well, they made a lens for that glorious Body and fried old Gonsalvez with it. Were you looking on?"

"No," said Ruth, and shivered.

"Well, I did—perforce. 'Twas part of my lesson; for you must know that I, too, had had my little difficulty over that same glorious Sun, touching his standing still over Gibeon at the command of ancient Joshua. 'Faith, I've no quarrel with a miracle or so, up and down; but that one. . . . Well, they convinced me I was a fool to have any doubt, and a worse fool to let it slip off the tongue. And yet," said the Penitent, warming his hands and casting a look up at the sky, where the dust-cloud had given place to a rolling pall of smoke, "what a treat it is to let the tongue wag at times!"

Ruth, her strength refreshed by the few minutes' rest, thanked him and arose to continue her search.

"Stay," said the Penitent. "Your Excellency has not heard all the story, nor yet arrived near the moral. . . . Between ourselves the reverend fathers were lenient with me because—well, it may have been be-

cause I hold some influence among the beggars of Lisbon, who are numerous and not always meek, in spite of the promise that meekness shall inherit the earth. I may confess, in short, that my presence in the procession was to some extent a farce, and the result of a compromise. But, all the same, your Excellency does ill to disbelieve in miracles—as I daresay your Excellency, casting an eye about Lisbon on this particular day of All the Saints, will not dispute?"

"Alas, sir! I have seen too many horrors to-day to be in any mood to argue."

"Then," said the Penitent, skipping up, "you are in the precise mood to be convinced; as I have seen men, under extremity of torture, ready to believe anything. Come!"

She hesitated. "Where would you lead me?"

"To a miracle," he answered, and, with a fine gesture, flinging his tattered cloak over his shoulder, he led the way. He strode rapidly down a couple of streets. Once or twice coming to a chasm across the roadway he paused, drew back, and cleared it with a leap. But at these pitfalls he neither turned nor offered Ruth a hand. She followed him panting, so agile was his pace.

The first street ran south, the second east. He entered a third which turned north again as if to lead back into the Square. After following it for twenty yards he halted and allowed her to catch up with him.

"You are a devoted wife," said the Penitent admiringly. "Would it alter your devotion at all to know that he was with another woman?"

"No," answered Ruth. "I knew it, in fact." She wondered that this beggar man could force her to speak so frankly.

"In an earthquake," said he, "one gets down to naked truth, or near to it. If he were unfaithful now—would that alter your desire to find and save him?"

"Sir, why do you ask these things?"

"Did your Excellency not know that its beggars are the eyes of Lisbon? But you have not answered me."

"Nor will. That I am here—is it not enough?"

The Penitent peered at her in the dim light and nodded. He led her forward a pace or two and pointed to something imbedded in a pile of stones, lime, rubble. It was the wreck of a chaise. Two mules lay crushed under it, their heads and a couple of legs protruding. A splintered door, wrenched from its hinges, lay face-uppermost crowning the heap. It bore a coronet and the arms of Montalegre.

"Are they—" she stammered, but caught at her voice and recovered it. "—Are they here, under this?"

"No," he said, and again led the way, crossing the street to a house of which the upper story overhung the street, supported by a line of pillars. Three or four of these pillars had fallen. Of the rest, nine out of ten stood askew, barely holding up the house,

through the floors of which stout beams had thrust themselves and stuck at all angles from the burst plaster.

"Here is Milord Vyell," said the Penitent, picking up a broken lath and pointing with it.

He lay on his back, as he had lain for close upon three hours, deep in the shadow of the overhanging house. His eyes were wide open. They stared up at the cobwebs that dangled from the broken plaster. A pillar, in weight maybe half a ton, rested across his thighs; an oaken beam across his chest and his broken left arm. The two pinned him hopelessly.

Clutched to him in his right lay Donna Maria. She seemed to sleep, with her head turned from his breast and laid upon the upper arm. The weight of the pillar resting on her bowels had squeezed the life out of her. She was dead: her flesh by this time almost cold.

"Oliver!—Ah, look at me!—I am here—I have come to help!"

The lids twitched slightly over his wide eyes. In the dim light she could almost be sworn that the lips, too, moved as though to speak. But no words came, and the eyes did not see her.

He was alive. What else mattered?

She knelt and flung her arms about the pillar. Frantically, vainly, she tugged at it: not by an inch or the tenth part of an inch could she stir it.

"Speak to me, Oliver! . . . Look at least!"

"If your Excellency will but have patience!" The Penitent stepped out into the street and she heard him blowing a whistle. Clearly he was a man to be obeyed; for in less than ten minutes a dozen figures crowded about the entrance, shutting out the day. This darkness of their making was in truth their best commendation. For against any one of them coming singly Ruth had undoubtedly held her dagger ready. They grumbled, too, and some even cursed the Penitent for having dragged them away from their loot. The Penitent called them cheerfully his little sons of the devil, and adjured them to fall to work or it would be the worse for them.

For his part, he lifted no hand: but stood overseer as the ruffians lifted the pillar, Ruth straining her strength with theirs.

But when they came to lift Donna Maria, for a moment something hitched, and Ruth heard the sound of rending cloth. The poor wretch in her death-agony had bitten through Sir Oliver's arm to the bone. The corpse yet clenched its jaws on the bite. They had to wrench the teeth open—delicate pretty teeth made for nibbling sweetmeats.

To his last day Oliver Vyell bore the mark of those pretty teeth, and took it to the grave with him.

Ruth drew out a purse. But the Penitent, though they grumbled, would suffer his scoundrels to take no

fee. Nay, he commanded two, and from somewhere out of devastated Lisbon they fetched a sedan-chair for the broken man. "You may pay these if you will," said he. "Honestly, they deserve it."

On her way westward, following the chair, she called to them to stop and search whereabouts Mr. Langton had fallen. They found him with the small greyhound standing guard beside the body. His head was pillowed on his arm, and he lay as one quietly sleeping.

CHAPTER VI

DOCUMENTS

I

From Abraham Castres Esq.: his Majesty's Envoy Extraordinary to the King of Portugal, to the Secretary of State, Whitehall, London.

"LISBON, *November 6th*, 1755.

"SIR,—You will in all likelihood have heard before this, of the inexpressible Calamity befallen the whole Maritime Coast, and in particular this opulent City, now reduced to a heap of Rubbish and Ruin, by a most tremendous Earthquake on the first of this Month, followed by a Conflagration, which has done ten times more Mischief than the Earthquake itself. I gave a short account of our Misfortune to *Sir Benjamin Keene*, by a *Spaniard*, who promised (as all intercourse by Post was at a stand) to carry my Letter as far as *Badajoz* and see it safe put into the Post House. It was merely to acquaint His Excellency that, God be praised, my House stood out the Shocks, though greatly damaged; and that, happening to be out of the reach of the Flames, several of my Friends, burnt out of their

Houses, had taken refuge with me, where I have accommodated them as well as I could, under Tents in my large Garden; no Body but *Lord Charles Dowglass*, who is actually on board the Packet, besides my Chaplain and myself having dared hitherto to sleep in my House, since the Day of our Disaster. The Consul and his Family have been saved, and are all well, in a Country House near this City. Those with me at present, are the *Dutch* Minister, his Lady, and their three Children, with seven or eight of their Servants. The rest of my Company of the better Sort consists of several Merchants of this Factory, who, for the most part have lost all they had; though some indeed, as Mess. *Parry* and *Mellish's* House, and Mr. *Raymond*, and *Burrell*, have had the good Fortune to save their Cash, either in whole or in part. The number of the Dead and Wounded I can give no certain Account of as yet; in that respect our Poor Factory has escaped pretty well, considering the number of Houses we have here. I have lost my Good and Worthy Friend the *Spanish* Ambassador, who was crushed under the Door, as he attempted to make his Escape into the Street. This with the Anguish I have been in for these five Days past, occasioned by the dismal Accounts brought to us every instant, of the Accidents befallen to one or other of our Acquaintance among the Nobility, who for the most part are quite Undone, has greatly affected me; but in particular the miserable Objects

among the lower sort of His Majesty's Subjects, who fly also to me for Bread, and lie scattered up and down in my Garden, with their Wives and Children. I have helped them all hitherto, and shall continue to do so, as long as Provisions do not fail Us, which I hope will not be the Case, by the Orders which *M. de Carvalho* has issued in that respect. One of our great Misfortunes is, that we have neither an *English* or *Dutch* Man of War in the Harbour. Some of their Carpenters and Sailors would have been of great use to me on this occasion, in helping to prop up my House; for as the Weather which has hitherto been remarkably fair, seems to threaten us with heavy Rains, it will be impossible for the Refugees in my Garden to hold out much longer; and how to find Rooms in my House for them all I am at a loss to devise; the Floors of most of them shaking under our Feet; and must consequently be too weak to bear any fresh number of Inhabitants. The Roads for the first Days having been impracticable, it was but yesterday I had the Honour in Company with *M. de la Calmette,* of waiting on the King of *Portugal,* and all the Royal Family at *Belem,* whom we found encamped; none of the Royal Palaces being fit to harbour Them. Though the loss His Most Faithful Majesty has sustained on this occasion is immense, and that His Capital-City is utterly Destroyed; He received us with more Serenity than we expected, and among other things told us, that He owed Thanks to

Providence for saving His and His Family's Lives: and that He was extremely glad to see us both safe. The Queen in her own Name, and all the young Princesses, sent us word that they were obliged to us for our attention; but that being under their Tents, and in a Dress not fit to appear in, They desired that for the present we would excuse their admitting our Compliments in Person. Most of the considerable Families in our Factory have already secured to themselves a passage to *England*, by three or four of our *London* Traders, that are preparing for their departure. As soon as the fatigue and great trouble of Mind I have endured for these first Days are a little over, I shall be considering of some proper method for sheltering the poorer Sort, either by hiring a *Portuguese* Hulk, or if that is not to be had, some *English* Vessel till they can be sent to *England;* and there are many who desire to remain, in hopes of finding among the Ruins some of the little Cash they may have lost in their Habitations. The best orders have been given for preventing Rapine, and Murders, frequent instances of which we have had within these three Days, there being swarms of *Spanish* Deserters in Town, who take hold of this opportunity of doing their business. As I have large sums deposited in my House, belonging to such of my Countrymen as have been happy enough to save some of their Cash, and that my House was surrounded all last Night with *Ruffians;* I have wrote this Morning

to *M. de Carvalho*, to desire a Guard, which I hope will not be refused. We are to have in a Day or two a Meeting of our scattered Factory at my House, to consider of what is best to be done in our present wretched Circumstances. I am determined to stay within call of the Distressed, as long as I can remain on Shore with the least Appearance of Security: and the same Mr. *Hay* (the Consul) seemed resolved to do, the last time I conferred with him about it. I most humbly beg your Pardon, Sir, for the Disorder of this Letter, surrounded as I am by many in Distress, who from one instant to the other are applying to me either for Advice or Shelter. The Packet has been detained at the Desire of the Factory, till another appears from *England*, or some Man of War drops in here from the *Streights*. This will go by the first of several of our Merchant Ships bound to *England*. I must not forget to acquaint you, that *Sir Oliver Vyell* and Lady are safe and well, and have the Honour to be, &c."

II

From the Same to the Same.

BELEM, *November 7th*, 1755.

"SIR,— . . . The present Scene of Misery and Distress is not to be described; the Kingdom of *Portugal* is ruined and undone, and *Lisbon*, one of the finest Cities that ever was seen, is now no more. The Escape

of the forementioned *Sir O. Vyell* is one of the most providential Things that ever was heard of; for whilst he was riding about the middle of the City in his Chaise, on the first instant, he observed the Driver to look behind him, and immediately to make the Mules gallop as fast as possible, but both he and they were very soon killed and buried in the Ruins of a House which fell on them; whereupon *Sir Oliver* jumped out of the Chaise, and ran into a House that instantly fell also to the Ground, and buried him in the Ruins for a considerable Time; but it pleased God that he was taken out alive, and not much bruised. His Lady likewise was providentially in the Garden when their House fell, and so escaped. About half an Hour after the first Shock, the City was on fire in five different Parts, and has been burning ever since, so that the *English* Merchants here are entirely ruined. There have been three Shocks every Day since the first, but none so violent as the first. The King has ordered all the Soldiers to assist in burying the Dead, to prevent a Plague; and indeed upon that Account the Fire was of Service in consuming the Carcasses both of Men and Beasts. The *English* have miraculously escaped, for notwithstanding the Factory was so numerous, not more than a Dozen are known to have been killed; amongst whom was poor *Mrs. Hake*, Sister to Governor *Hardy* of *New York*, who suffered as she was driving her Children before her; and the *Spanish* Am-

bassador was killed also, with his young Child in his Arms. Every person, from the King to the Beggar, is at present obliged to lay in the Fields, and some are apprehensive that a Famine may ensue."

III

An Extract of a Letter from on board a Ship in Lisbon Harbour, Nov: 19, to the same Purport.

"Mine will not bring you the first News of the most dreadful Calamity befallen this City and whole Kingdom. On *Saturday* the first instant, about half an Hour past nine o'clock, I was retired to my Room after Breakfast, when I perceived the House began to shake, but did not apprehend the Cause; however, as I saw the Neighbours about me all running down Stairs, I also made the best of my Way; and by the time I had cross'd the Street, and got under the Piazzas of some low House, it was darker than the darkest Night I ever was out in, and continued so for about a Minute, occasioned by the Clouds of Dust from the falling of Houses on all sides. After it cleared up, I ran into a large Square adjoining; but being soon alarmed with a Cry that the Sea was coming in, all the People crowded foreward to run to the Hills, I among the rest, with Mr. *Wood* and Family. We went near two Miles thro' the Streets, climbing over the Ruins of Churches,

Houses, &c., and stepping over hundreds of dead and dying People, Carriages, Chaises and Mules, lying all crushed to Pieces; and that Day being a great Festival in their Churches, and happening just at the time of celebrating the first Mass, thousands were assembled in the Churches, the major part of whom were killed; for the great Buildings, particularly those which stood on any Eminence, suffered the most Damage. Very few of the Churches or Convents have escaped. We staid near two Hours in an open Campo; and a dismal scene it was, the People howling and crying, and the Sacrament going about to dying persons: so I advised as the best, to return to the Square near our own House and there wait the event, which we did immediately, but by the Time we got there, the City was in Flames in several distant Parts, being set on fire by some Villains, who confessed it before Execution. This completed the Destruction of the greatest Part of the City; for in the Terror all Persons were, no Attempt was made to stop it; and the Wind was very high, so that it was communicated from one Street to another by the Flakes of Fire drove by the Winds. It raged with great Violence for eight Days, and this in the principal and most thronged Parts of the City; People being fled into the Fields half naked, the Fire consumed all sorts of Merchandise, Household Goods, and Wearing Apparel, so that hardly anything is left to cover People, and they live in Tents in the Fields. If

the Fire had not happened, People would have recovered their Effects out of the Ruins; but this has made such a Scene of Desolation and Misery as Words cannot describe.

"The King's Palace in the City is totally destroyed, with all the Jewels, Furniture, &c. The *India* Warehouses adjoining, full of rich Goods, are all consumed. The Custom-house, piled up with Bales upon Bales, is all destroyed; and the Tobacco and other Warehouses, with the Cargoes of three *Brazil* Fleets, shared the same Fate. In short, there are few Goods left in the whole City."

IV

From a Ship's Captain writing home under the same date.

". . . On Saturday the first instant, I arose at Five, in order to remove my Ship from the Custom-house, agreeable to my Order; by Nine we sailed down and anchored off the upper end of the *Terceras*. Wind at N. E. a small Breeze, and a fine clear morning. Ten Minutes before Ten, I felt the Ship have an uncommon Motion, and could not help thinking she was aground, although sure of the Depth of Water. As the Motion increased, my Amazement increased also; and as I was looking round to find out the Meaning of this uncommon Motion, I was immediately acquainted

with the direful Cause; when at that Instant looking towards the City, I beheld the tall and stately Buildings tumbling down, with great Cracks and Noise, and particularly that part of the City from *St. Paul's* in a direct Line to *Bairroalto;* as also, at the same Time, that Part from the said Church along the Riverside Eastward as far as the Gallows, and so in a curve Line Northward again; and the Buildings as far as *St. Joze* and the *Rofcio,* were laid in the three following Shocks, which were so violent as I heard many say they could with great Difficulty stand on their Legs. There is scarce one House of this great City left habitable. The Earth opened, and rent in several Places, and many expected to be swallowed up.—As it happened at a Time when the Kitchens were furnished with Fires, they communicated their Heat to the Timber with which their Houses were built or adorned, and in which the Natives are very curious and expensive, both in Furniture and Ceilings; and by this means the City was in a Blaze in different Parts at once. The Conflagration lasted a whole Week.—What chiefly contributed to the Destruction of the City, was the Narrowness of the Streets. It is not to be expressed by Human Tongue, how dreadful and how awful it was to enter the City after the Fire was abated: when looking upwards one was struck with Terror at beholding frightful Pyramids of ruined Fronts, some inclining one Way, some another; then on the other hand with

Horror, in viewing Heaps of Bodies crushed to death, half-buried and half-burnt; and if one went through the broad Places or Squares, there was nothing to be met with but People bewailing their Misfortunes, wringing their Hands, and crying *The World is at an End.* In short, it was the most lamentable Scene that Eyes could behold. As the Shocks, though Small, are frequent, the People keep building Wooden Houses in the Fields; but the King has ordered no Houses to be built to the Eastward of *Alcantara* Gate.—Just now four *English* Sailors have been condemned for stealing Goods, and hiding them in the Ballast, with Intent to make a Property of them."

CHAPTER VII

THE LAST OFFER

His villa being destroyed, they had carried Sir Oliver out to Belem, to one of the wooden hospitals hastily erected in the royal grounds. There the King's surgeon dressed his wounds and set the broken left arm, Ruth attending with splints and bandages.

When all was done and the patient asleep, she crept forth. She would fain have stayed to watch by him; but this would have meant crowding the air for the sufferers, who already had much ado to breathe. She crept forth, therefore, and slept that night out on the naked ground, close under the lee of the canvas.

Early next morning she was up and doing. A dozen hospitals had been improvised and each was crying out for helpers. She chose that of her friend Mr. Castres, the British envoy. It stood within a high-walled garden, sheltered from the wind which, for some days after the earthquake, blew half a gale. At first the hospital consisted of two tents; but in the next three days these increased to a dozen, filling the garden. Then, just as doctors and nurses despaired of coping with it, the influx of wounded slackened and ceased,

almost of a sudden. In the city nothing remained now but to bury the dead, and in haste, lest their corpses should breed pestilence. It was horribly practical; but every day, as she awoke, her first thought was for the set of the wind; her first fear that in the night it might have shifted, might be blowing from the east across Lisbon. The wind, however, kept northerly as though it had been nailed to that quarter. She heard that gangs were at work clearing the streets and collecting the dead; at first burying them laboriously; after the third day, burning them in stacks. As the Penitent had said, in an earthquake one gets down to nakedness. During those next ten days Ruth lived hourly face to face with her kind, men and women, naked, bleeding, suffering.

She contrived too, all this while, to have the small motherless Hake children near her, inventing a hundred errands to keep them busy. Thus, to be sure, they saw many things too sad for their young eyes, yet Ruth perceived that in feeling helpful they escaped the worst broodings of bereavement, and, on the whole, watching them at times, as their small hands were busy tearing up bandages or washing out medicine bottles, she felt satisfied that their mother would have wished it so.

Sir Oliver's arm healed well, and in general (it seemed) he was making a rapid recovery. It was remarkable, though, that he seldom smiled, and scarcely

spoke at all save to answer a question. He would rest for hours at a time staring straight in front of him, much as he had lain and stared up at the ceiling of the fatal house. Something weighed on his mind; or maybe the brain had received a shock and must have time to recover. Ruth watched him anxiously, keeping a cheerful face.

But there came an evening when, as she returned, tired but cheerful, from the hospital, he called her to him.

"Ruth!"

"My lord." She was beside his couch in a moment.

"I have something to say to you; something I have wanted to say for days. But I wanted also to think it all out. . . . I have not yet asked you to forgive me—"

"Dear, you were forgiven long ago."

"—But I have asked Heaven to forgive me."

Ruth gave a little start and stared at him doubtfully.

"Yes," he went on, "as I lay pinned—those hours through, waiting for death—something opened to me; a new life, I hope."

"And by a blessing I do not understand—by a blessing of blessings—you were given back to it, Oliver."

"Back to it?" he repeated. "You do not understand me. The blessing was God's special grace; the new life I speak of was a life acknowledging that grace."

There was silence for many seconds; for a minute almost. Ruth's hands had locked themselves together, and she pulled at the intertwisted fingers.

"I beg your pardon," she said at length. "You are right—I do not understand." Her voice had lost its ring; the sound of it was leaden, spiritless. But he failed to note this, being preoccupied with his own thoughts. Nor did he observe her face.

"I would not speak of this before," he went on, still with his eyes turned to the window, "because I wanted to think it all out. But it is true, Ruth; I am a changed man."

"I hope not."

Again he did not hear, or he failed to heed. "Not," he pursued, "that any amount of thinking could alter the truth. The mercy of God has been revealed to me. When a man has been through such horrors—lying there, with that infernal woman held to me——"

"Ah!" she interposed with a catch of the breath. "Do not curse her. She was dead, poor thing!"

"I tell you that I cursed her as I cursed myself. . . . Yes, we both deserved to die. She died with her teeth in my flesh—the flesh whose desire was all we ever had in common."

"Yes . . . I knew."

"Have you the coat I wore?"

"It is folded away. Some boxes of clothes were saved from the house, and I laid it away in one of them."

"Her teeth must have torn it?"

"Yes." Ruth would have moved away in sheer heart-sickness. Why would he persist in talking thus?

"I shall always keep that coat. If ever I am tempted to forget the mercy of God, the rent in that coat shall remind me."

She wanted to cry aloud, "Oh, cease, cease!" This new pietism of his revolted her almost to physical sickness. She recognised in it the selfishness she had too fatally learned to detect in all pietism. "At least he had owed enough to his poor little fellow-sinner to spare a thought of pity!" . . . But a miserable restraint held her tongue as he went on—

"Yes, Ruth. God showed Himself to me in that hour; showed me, too, all the evil of my past life. I had no hope to live; but I vowed to Him then, if I lived, to live as one reformed."

He paused here, as if waiting for her to speak. She did not speak. She felt her whole body stiffening; she wanted, too, to laugh outright, scornfully. "The evil of his past life? Am I next to be expelled, as a part of it? Is it up to *this* he would lead? . . . God help me, if there be a God!—that this should be the man I loved!"

"And another oath I swore," he went on solemnly: "to do what compensation I may to any my sinning has injured. You are the chief of these."

"I, Oliver?"

"You, who under Heaven were made, and properly, the means of saving my life to repentance."

Somehow with this new piety he had caught the very phraseology and intonation of its everyday professors, even those very tricks of bad logic at which he had been used to laugh. Ruth had always supposed, for example, that the presumption of instructing the Deity in appropriate conduct was impossible even to second-rate minds until by imitation slowly acquired as a habit. It was monstrous to her that he should so suddenly and all unconsciously be guilty of it. Indeed for the moment these small evidences of the change in him distressed her more than the change itself, which she had yet to realise; just as in company a solecism of speech or manners will make us wince before we have time to trace it to the ill-breeding from which it springs. His mother, she had heard (he, in fact, had told her), was given to these pious tricks of speech. Surely his fine brain had suffered some lesion. He was not himself, and she must wait for his recovery. But surely, too, he would recover and be himself again.

"Ruth, I have done you great wrong."

"O cease! cease, Oliver!" Her voice cried it aloud now, as she dropped to her knees and buried her face in the coverlet. "Do not talk like this—I had a hundred times rather you neglected me than hear you talk so! *You* have done me evil? *You*, my lord, my love? You, who saved me? You, in whose eyes I have found

grace, and in that my great, great happiness? You, in whose light my life has moved? . . . Ah, love, do not break my heart!"

"You misunderstand," he said quietly. "Why should what I am saying break your heart? I am asking you to marry me."

She rose from her knees very slowly and went to the window. Standing there, again she battled off the temptation to laugh wildly. . . . She fought it down after a minute, and turned to encounter his gaze, which had not ceased to rest on her wistfully as she stood with her beautiful figure silhouetted against the evening light.

"You really think my marrying you would make a difference?"

"To me it would make all the difference," he urged, but still very gently as one who, sure of himself, might reason with a child. "I doubt if I shall recover, indeed, until this debt is paid."

"A debt, Oliver? What kind of debt?"

"Why, of gratitude, to be sure. Did you not win me back from death?—to be a new and different man henceforth, please God!"

Upon an excuse she left him and went to her own sleeping tent. It stood a little within the royal garden of Belem, and (the weather being chilly) the guard of the gate usually kept a small brazier alight for her. This evening for some reason he had neglected it, and

the fire had sunk low. She stooped to rake its embers together, and, as she did so, at length her laughter escaped her; soft laughter, terrible to hear.

In the midst of it a voice—a high, jolly, school-boy voice—called out from the gateway demanding, in execrable Portuguese, to be shown Lady Vyell's tent. She dropped the raking-iron with a clatter and stood erect, listening.

"Dicky?" . . . she breathed.

Yes; the tent flap was lifted and Dicky stood there in the twilight; a Dicky incredibly grown.

"Dicky!"

"Motherkin!" He was folded in her arms.

"But what on earth brings you to this terrible Lisbon, of all places?"

"Well, motherkin," said he with the finest air of importance, "a man would say that if a crew of British sailors could be useful anywhere— We'll teach your Portuguese, anyhow. Oh, yes, the *Pegasus* was at Gibraltar—we felt the shock there pretty badly—and the Admiral sent us up the coast to give help where we could. A coaster found us off Lagos with word that Lisbon had suffered worst of all. So we hammered at it, wind almost dead foul all the way . . . and here we are. Captain Hanmer brought me ashore in his gig. My word, but the place is in a mess!"

"That is Captain Hanmer's footstep I hear by the gate."

"Yes, he has come to pay his respects. But come," said the boy, astonished, "you don't tell me you know Old Han's footstep—begging his pardon—at all this distance."

Yes, she did. She could have distinguished that tread had it marched among a thousand. Her brain had held the note of it ever since the night she had heard it at Sabines, crushing the gravel of the drive. Dicky laughed incredulous. She held the boy at arm's length, lovingly, as Captain Hanmer came and stood by the tent door.

So life might yet sound with honest laughter; ay, and at the back of laughter, with the firm tread of duty.

The story of Ruth Josselin and Oliver Vyell is told. They were married ten days later in the hospital at Belem by a priest of the Church of Rome, and afterwards, on their way to England in His Majesty's frigate *Calliope*, which had brought out stores for the relief of the suffering city and was now returning with most of the English survivors, Sir Oliver insisted on having the union again ratified by the services of the ship's chaplain. Ruth, whose sense of humour had survived the earthquake, could smile at this supererogation.

They landed at Plymouth, and, posting to Bath, were tenderly welcomed by Lady Jane, to whom her son's conversion was hardly less a matter of rejoicing than his rescue from a living tomb. In Bath Ruth

Lady Vyell might have reigned as a toast, a queen of society; but Sir Oliver had learnt a distaste for fashionable follies, nor did she greatly yearn for them.

He remained a Whig, however, and two years later received appointment to the post of Consul-General at Lisbon. Its duties were not arduous, and allowed him to cross the Atlantic half a dozen times with Lady Vyell and revisit Eagles, where Miss Quiney held faithful stewardship. He never completely recovered his health. The pressure under which he had lain during those three terrible hours had left him with some slight curvature of the spine. It increased, and ended in a constriction of the lungs, bringing on a slow decline. In 1767 he again retired to Bath, where next year he died, aged fifty-one years. His epitaph on the wall of the Abbey nave runs as follows:—

> "To the memory of Sir Oliver Hastings Pelham Vyell of Carwithiel, Co. Cornwall, Baronet, Consul-General for many years at Lisbon, whence he came in hopes of Recovery from a Bad State of Health to Bath. Here, after a tedious and painful Illness, sustained with the Patience and Resignation becoming to a Christian, he died Jan. 11, 1768, in the Fifty-second Year of his Life, without Heir. This Monument is erected by his affectionate Widow, Ruth Lady Vyell."

EPILOGUE

EPILOGUE

RUTH LADY VYELL stood in the empty minster beneath her husband's epitaph, and conned it, puckering her brow slightly in the effort to keep her thoughts collected.

She had not set eyes on the tablet since the day the stonemasons had fixed it in place, and that was close upon eight years ago. On the morrow, her pious duty fulfilled, she had taken post for Plymouth, there to embark for America; and the intervening years had been lived in widowhood at Eagles until the outbreak of the Revolution had forced her, early in 1775, to take shelter in Boston, and in the late fall of the year to sail back to England. For Eagles, though unravaged, had passed into the hands of the "rebels"; and Ruth, though an ardent loyalist, kept her old clearness of vision, and foresaw that King George could not beat his Colonists; that the stars in their courses fought against this stupid monarch.

This pilgrimage to Bath had been her first devoir on reaching England. She had nursed him tenderly through his last illness, as she had been in all respects an exemplary wife. Yet, standing beneath his monu-

ment, she felt herself an impostor. She could find here no true memories of the man whose look had swayed her soul, whose love she had served with rites a woman never forgets. This city of Bath did not hold the true dust of her lord and love. He had perished—if sinning against her, what mattered it?—years ago, under a fallen pillar in a street of Lisbon. Doubtless the site had been built over; it would be hard to find now, so actively had the Marquis de Pombal, Portugal's First Minister, renovated the ruined city. But whether discoverable or not, there and not here was written the last of Oliver Vyell.

Somehow in her thoughts of him on the other side of the Atlantic, in her demesne of Eagles where they had walked together as lovers, she had not separated her memories of him so sharply. Now, suddenly, with a sense of having been cheated, she saw Oliver Vyell as two separate men. The one had possessed her; she had merely married the other.

With the blank sense of having been cheated mingled a sense that she herself was the cheat. The tablet accused her of it, confronting her with words which, all too sharply, she remembered as of her own composing. "*After a tedious and painful Illness, sustained with the Patience and Resignation belonging to a Christian.*" Why to a Christian more than to another? Was it not mere manliness to bear (as, to do him justice, he had borne) ill-health with fortitude, and face dissolution

with courage? How had she ever come to utter coin that rang with so false and cheap a note? She felt shame of it. The taint of its falsehood seemed to blend and become one with a general odour of humbug, sickly, infectious, stealing along the darkened Gothic aisles, insinuating itself. Since nothing is surer than death, nothing can be corrupter than mortality deceiving itself. . . . The west door of the Abbey stood open. Ruth, striving to collect her thoughts, saw the sunlight beyond it spread broad upon the city's famous piazza. Sounds, too, were wafted in through the doorway, penetrating the hush, distracting her; rumble of workday traffic, voices of vendors in distant streets; among these—asserting itself quietly, yet steadily, regularly as a beat in music—a footfall on the pavement outside. . . . She knew the footfall. She distinguished it from every other. Scores of times in the watches of the night she had lain and listened to it, hearing it in imagination only, echoed from memory, yet distinct upon the ear as the tramp of an actual foot, manly and booted; hearing it always with a sense of helplessness as though with that certain deliberate tread marched her fate upon her, inexorably nearing. This once again—she told herself—it must be in fancy that she heard it. For how should *he* be in Bath?

She stepped quickly out through the porchway to assure herself. She stood there a moment, while her eyes accustomed themselves to the sunlight, and Cap-

tain Hanmer came towards her from the shadow of the colonnade by the great Pump-room. He carried his left arm in a sling, and with his right hand lifted his hat, but awkwardly.

"I had heard of your promotion," she said after they had exchanged greetings, "and of your wound, and I dare say you will let me congratulate you on both, since the same gallantry earned them. . . . But what brings you to Bath? . . . To drink the waters, I suppose, and help your convalescence."

"They have a great reputation," he answered gravely; "but I have never heard it claimed that they can extract a ball or the splinters from a shattered forearm. The surgeons did the one, and time must do the other, if it will be so kind. . . . No, I am in Bath because my mother lives here. It is my native city, in fact."

"Ah," she said, "I was wondering——"

"Wondering?" He echoed the word after a long pause. He was plainly surprised. "You knew that I was here, then?"

"Not until a moment ago, when I heard your footstep." As this appeared to surprise him still more, she added, "You have, whether you know it or not, a noticeable footstep, and I a quick ear. Shall I tell you where, unless fancy played me a trick, I last proved its quickness?"

He bent his head as sign for assent.

"It was in Boston," she said, "last June—on the evening after the fight at Bunker Hill. At midnight, rather. Before seven o'clock the hospitals were full and they brought half a dozen poor fellows to my lodgings in Garden Court Street. Towards midnight one of them, that had lain all the afternoon under the broiling sun by the *Mystic* and had taken a sunstroke on top of his wound, began raving. My maid and I were alone in the house, and we agreed that he was dangerous. I told her that there was nothing to fear; that for an hour past some one had been patrolling the side-walk before the house; and I bade her go downstairs and desire him to fetch a surgeon. You were that sentinel."

Again he bent his head. "I was serving on board the *Lively*," he said, "in the ferry-way between you and Charlestown. I had heard of you—that you had taken lodgings in Boston, and that the temper of the mob might be uncertain. So that night I got leave ashore, on the chance of being useful. I brought the doctor, if you remember."

"But would not present yourself to claim our thanks." She looked at him shrewdly. "To-day—did you know that I was in Bath?" she asked. He owned, "Yes; he had read of her arrival in the *Gazette*, among the fashionable announcements." He did not add, but she divined, that he had waited for her by the Abbey, well

guessing that her steps would piously lead her thither and soon. She changed the subject in some haste.

"Your mother lives in Bath?"

"She has lived here all her life."

"Sir Oliver spent his last days here. I am sorry that I had not her acquaintance to cheer me."

"It was unlikely that you should meet. We live in the humblest of ways."

"Nevertheless it would be kind of you to make us acquainted. Indeed," she went on, "I very earnestly desire it, having a great need—since you are so hard to thank directly—to thank you through somebody for many things, and especially for helping Dicky."

He laughed grimly as he fell into step with her, or tried to—but his obstinate stride would not be corrected. "All the powers that ever were," he said, "could not hinder Dicky. He has his captaincy in sight—at his age!—and will be flying the blue before he reaches forty. Mark my words."

On their way up the ascent of Lansdowne Hill he told her much concerning Dicky—not of his success in the service, which she knew already, but of the service's inner opinion of him, which set her blood tingling. She glanced sideways once or twice at the strong, awkward man who, outpaced by the stripling, could rejoice in his promotion without one twinge of jealousy, loving him merely as one good sailor should love another. She noted him as once or twice he tried to correct his

pace by hers. Her thoughts went back to the tablet in the Abbey, commemorating a husband who (if it told truth) had never been hers. She compared him, all in charity, with two who had given her an unpaid devotion. One slept at Lisbon, in the English cemetery. The other walked beside her even with such a tread as out somewhere on the dark floor of the sea he had paced his quarter-deck many a night through, pausing only to con his helm beneath the stars.

They turned aside into an unfashionable by-street, and halted before a modest door in a row. Ruth noted the railings, that they were spick-and-span as paint could make them; the dainty window-blinds. Through the passage-way, as he opened the door, came wafted from a back garden the clean odour of flowering stock.

In the parlour to the right of the passage, a frail, small woman rose from her chair to welcome them.

"Mother," said her son, "this is Lady Vyell."

The little woman stretched out her hands, and then, before Ruth could take them, they were lifted and touched her temples softly, and she bent to their benediction.

"My son has often talked of you. May the Lord bless you, my dear. May the Lord cause His face to shine upon you all your days!"

THE END

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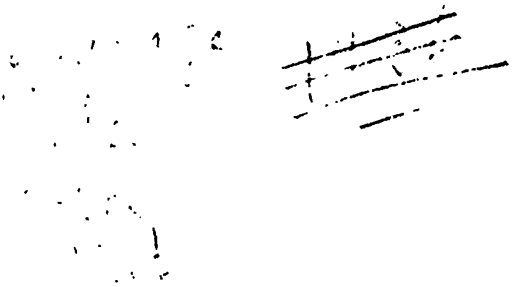

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